

Bulgarian Realists

- getting to know Bulgaria through its art

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May 2017

DEDICATION

To my daughters - Hilary, Jan and Susanna

To enter into the subjective life of another culture - its symbolic codes, its overt beliefs and implicit assumptions - requires, as any immigrant or nomad can tell you, a considerable effort of consciousness and imagination; a kind of stretching of self towards the other- and a gradual grasp of differences which are sometimes imperceptible and subtle.

Cultures are neither static nor monolithic organisms - they are complex, changeable and internally diverse. What is considered healthily assertive in one culture may be seen as aggressive or hostile in another; certain kinds of personal disclosure which may seem quite unproblematic in one society may be seen as embarrassing or entirely unacceptable elsewhere.....

We live in a world in which various kinds of cross-national movement - migrations, travel, various kinds of both enforced and voluntary nomadism - are ever on the rise...

If we are to meet with each other on the basis of trust rather than tension or insidious indifference, we need to have ways of getting acquainted with each other which are more than cursory, or purely instrumental.

But how can this be accomplished?

What kind of knowledge is needed to feed meaningful cross-cultural contacts?

Inner Lives of Cultures (2011) ed Eva Hoffman

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Who? Me? **Note about the author**

1. "This is not a guide" (with apologies to Rene Magritte!)

1.1 Introduction

Because of its location, size or its Cyrillic script and language, Bulgaria has a low global profile - although the Black Sea sands and its (red) wines have long been known to the British public; and its ski slopes to younger travellers. A few retired people have also been amazed by the richness of its monasteries...

Apart, however, from the obvious travel guides, there are almost no books about the country which might be given to the discerning visitor.

When my youngest daughter visited me here in October 2013, I was able to give her one of the remaining copies of a little booklet I had produced in 2012 - [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#) - which basically contained brief notes on 140 painters I had identified in my initial forays into Bulgarian Realist Art; a few reproductions and a CD with pictures of about 1000 paintings.

Since then, however, my trips to the antiquarians here in Sofia have paid rich dividends (indeed the weight of the art books brought a shelf crashing down on my fingers not so long ago). And the prospect of my eldest daughter's visit in early 2015 helped open up more internet riches - particularly historical.

The book makes no attempt to offer any guidance about places to visit - that is the staple fare of guidebooks and tourist guides which can be easily accessed (many with hyperlinks) at section 4.1. Its original aim was to introduce "modern realist" Bulgarian painting to visitors and to encourage them to spend time (and perhaps some money) browsing the galleries here - where a very friendly welcome awaits (all the more so if you show that you know something about the Bulgarian painters.) As, however, I was preparing what I thought would be the final draft of a new edition - with an annotated list of almost 300 painters and 100 pages of diary entries about my discoveries - I realised that a focus on visitors to the country was imposing a silly restriction on the book's potential readership and indeed impact.....

We live, after all, in an increasingly homogenised world - places with traces of older ways of behaviour let alone the feel of antiquity are increasingly impossible to find. And, when found, they need nurture - not hordes of people tramping the grounds and polluting the atmosphere.

So, despite the many attractions of the country, this is not a book which encourages you to visit famous sites - it is rather a book which celebrates people who may be long dead but who have still left a bit of themselves in the attitudes and tastes of those who now inhabit its country.

Since my return in 2007 from an eight-year sojourn in Central Asia I have had one foot in Sofia, another in Bucharest and a third in a Transylvanian mountain village; and the opportunity to observe two very different countries which straddle the lower reaches of the Danube.

Ours may be a globalised world and Europe a highly connected system (not least through its cross-border programmes) but European nations remain remarkably indifferent - indeed parochial - about their respective cultural heritage. I have transported more than 100 (framed) paintings (and a similar number of drawings and unframed aquarelles) across the Danube at Russe but have to recognise that they are met with total indifference in Bucharest whose active [auction house Artmark](#) rarely (if ever) offers a Bulgarian painting. And it is only a Baba that occasionally surfaces in a Sofia auction house.....

My collection of Bulgarian Realists - which would arouse great interest in Bulgaria - is boring for the rest of Europe. And that is by no means unusual since, for example, British audiences know little of the great German let alone Scandinavian traditions..... I am at the time of my life when I start to wonder what will happen to my modest little collection of Bulgarian paintings - this little book is one way to raise the profile within Europe of this very special artistic tradition (which includes ceramics and woodcarvings)

It starts with a PowerPoint-like potted history; then tries to identify where good material about both Sofia and Bulgaria can be found (with some 500 hyperlinks)

The book's second half consists of my notes as I travelled around the country, officially to supervise some courses in a (European) project but in reality to visit the local galleries and taste the regional wines.....

1.2 Ways of Seeing

This book on neglected, cultural aspects of Bulgaria comes a couple of years after [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014) which I offered as a short guide for one of my daughters who was making her first visit to the country.

It identified 16 different ways which can be used to throw light on countries. They can be grouped into three distinctive types -

First those which can be **easily accessed** in one's own language such as

- *travel guides*;
- *travelogues* - which can be divided into the serious or the (sadly increasing number of) tongue-in-cheek type;
- *potted histories* - dealing with what are considered to be the key events in the shaping of a nation;
- *internet sites* eg tourists sites and *blogs of ex-pats* - there is only one I know of which blogs exclusively about the country - the [From the Back of Beyond](#) blog

Then those requiring a **good grasp of the language of the country being visited** - ie

- novels;
- social and cultural histories (including jokes) - which give insights into how ordinary people lived their lives;
- memoirs and diaries - dealing with those who were more "distinguished";
- magazines;
- television, films and plays;

The final group consists of those which **rely only on the senses**- ie

- photographs;
- paintings, graphics;
- sculpture, ceramics;
- buildings;
- music;
- food and wine
- conversations and encounters;

This book is a guide for those who want to use their senses – in all their diversity. I was indeed tempted to use the subtitle “a sensual guide to Bulgaria” but reckoned that it might attract the wrong sort of reader!!

.....And its focus on painters reflects a discovery I made when I started a project in Sofia in summer 2007

As the quotation on the dedication page suggests, I have become increasingly fascinated by the question of how we might attempt to penetrate the soul of a country....not for nothing does my visiting card bear the rubric “Explorer and aesthete”!

Serious studies on countries tend to be written from the perspective of one particular academic discipline - be it history, economics, politics. Anthropology seems to offer more eg [The anthropology of Ireland](#). And a series on the [cultural history of cities](#) is quite excellent.

Painting is a good “handle” on a country - but it’s rarely used. Peter Robb’s [Midnight in Sicily](#) gives a “food and Mafia” take on that country; and [Simon Winder’s “Germania”](#) and [Neil McGregor’s “Germany; memories of a nation”](#) cultural takes on Germany both skate over painting.

Bulgarians know most about their country and have written the best material eg

- Ivan Daraktchiev’s amazing [Bulgaria: Terra Europeansis Incognita](#) gives us 600 pages of superb photographs and provocative (English) text about the history (ancient and recent) and landscape of the country - and its relationship with neighbours.
- The owner of Sofia’s Neros Gallery, Ruhmen Manov, went one better in summer 2014 with (bilingual) [A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria](#) which weighs in at 7 kilos and 700 pages - based on his personal collection of old Bulgarian photos and cultural artefacts. It does indeed give a stunning sense of Bulgaria’s more recent history.
- the 600 page [Sofia’s Mount Athos](#) by Valentina Sharlanova (Drinov Academic Publishing 2013) is a superb study (complete with photos and GPS coordinates) of the 46 monasteries which cluster around Sofia - many since the 14th century.
- “*The Architecture of the Old Bulgarian Villages*”; Stefan Stamov (2006) 350 pages written by the doyen of Bulgarian writers on architecture. Bilingual
- *Rhodopes; the Sacred Mountain* (Club 8 2014); an absolutely wonderful 245 page photographic tribute to the area - with brief text

But we warned, these are heavy volumes and add unwelcome kilos at the airport weigh-in!

This particular book started its life quite literally as a scribbled list on the back of an envelope - of painters whom a gallery friend thought I should know about in 2008 or thereabouts.....

1.3 Memory’s Veil

It was apparently [Benjamin Disraeli](#) who suggested that “the best way to become acquainted with a subject is to write a book about it” and [Henry James](#) who asked “How can I know what I think until I read what I have written?” It is in that spirit that the book is written since -

- very little written about Bulgaria conveyed any real sense of why the country is worth investing time in (the exceptions you can find at section 3.1)
- nothing is (or ever has been) available in the English language about Bulgarian art

This list of 200 or so Bulgarian artists of the "realist" style was purely functional - to help me (and visitors) learn more about the richness of the work (and lives) of artists who are now, for the most part, long dead and - largely - forgotten.

It was, however, only when I was going through a catalogue and found myself constantly having to add the phrase "a superb but forgotten painter" to the names in my book that I realized **that the book contains a sub-text which I had completely failed to noticethat of memory.....and forgetting...**

Like many other European countries, Bulgaria has had periods during which a "veil of silence" has been drawn over parts of its history - with September 1944 being the point at which individual memories became selective. By contrast memories of the struggles which brought independence from the Ottomans in 1878 have always burned brightly.....

The book emerged initially from a few scribbled lists....Of course my own artistic tastes have given me a bias toward the more traditional (realist) artists and the reader will find a gap in the list of painters who were becoming active in the period after 1970 or so.....The communist period had its own idiosyncrasies (Socialist Realism faded in the 1970s) but the post-modernist painters of that period don't really figure here - except for such people as Bencho Obreshkov and Svetlin Russev - simply because the events of 1989/90 have made it convenient for a new "veil of silence" to be drawn by some powerful people over the previous 45 years¹.

It was only when I was about to send the text to the printer that it was brought home to me that the whole book is, in a sense, an ODE TO FORGETFULNESS and that my references to Bulgarian events and people are simply one of myriad examples about what I've taken to calling "Memory's Veil" - the highly selective way all of us - in whatever country - remember people and talent.

Some of you may know the author Nassim Nicholas Taleb whose book [The Black Swan](#) became a best-seller a few years ago. In it he makes a profound point about the process by which artistic "genius" is recognised (or not - the latter being more often the case)

*More than four centuries ago, the English essayist Francis Bacon had a very simple intuition. The idea is so trivial that he puts to shame almost all empirical thinkers who came after him until very recently..... Bacon mentioned a man who, upon being shown the pictures of those worshipers who paid their vows then subsequently escaped shipwreck, wondered **where were the pictures of those who happened to drown after their vows.***

The lack of effectiveness of their prayers did not seem to be taken into account by the supporters of the handy rewards of religious practice. "And such is the way of all superstition, whether in astrology, dreams, omens, divine judgments, or the like", he wrote in his Novum Organum, written in 1620.

This is a potent insight: the drowned worshippers, being dead, do not advertise their experiences. They are invisible and will be missed by the casual observer who will be led to believe in miracles.

¹ But see "A Decade in the Archives" (2002); and "Afternoon of an Ideology" (2016). "Art for Change 1985-2015" (2015) is an interesting bilingual survey of the significance of the post-1989 changes

Not just in miracles, as Taleb goes onto argue.....it is also the process which decides whether an artist is remembered. For every artist of genius, there have been many more with the same talent but whose profile, somehow, was submerged....

Art, of course, is the subject of high fashion - reputations ebb and flow.....we are vaguely aware of this...but it is money that speaks in the art "market" and it is the din of the cash register to which the ears of most art critics and dealers are attuned.....One of the few other people I know who celebrates unknown or, rather, forgotten artists is Jonathan in Wales who runs a great blog called [My Daily Art Display](#) which fleshes out the detail of the lives of long-forgotten but superb artists.....

1.4 What authority do I have to write about (aspects of) Bulgarian Culture?

I've never found it easy [to use a noun to explain how I earned my living](#) - having generally to resort to verbs such as "analysing institutions" or "writing reports" - but art has never figured as a professional activity. It's simply something that crept up and hit me while I was living in Bulgaria in 2008.



If you look at the blog - [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - which I have developed since my semi-retirement in 2009; or my [Mapping Common Ground](#) or [older professional](#) website, you will see that I am more of a writer...

But now I have become a collector of Bulgarian art and, through that, curious about aspects of Bulgaria's culture and history. This painting, for example, is one of four superb seascapes I have by one Petar Boiadjiev about whom my searches can unearth no trace!!

He's one of more than 200 artists listed in this book and great proof for me of the richness of the Bulgarian tradition.

The reader might well ask about living artists.....several of whom have become my friends.... Like all true artists, their life is often a struggle but they embody a creativity which I have come to admire.....I have therefore (but belatedly) included a (tiny) section on that subject before the main section of the book.

Let's start with a brief outline of some important things any visitor should know about Bulgaria -

2. Things you need to know

Most signs are in Cyrillic - and it's worth learning the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet in order to understand what trade is being carried out by the various small shops. Suddenly the world begins to make sense again! "Хотдог" is one of my favourites!

When people shake their head, they're actually agreeing! Unless (the younger ones) they're smart and fast enough to react appropriately when they realise you're foreign! This makes for some confusion since - in order to interpret the response - you have to make a quick decision about which genre of Bulgarian you're dealing with!!

All educated young Bulgarians speak good English - although their parents have had to make a lot of (unofficial) payments to get them into the right schools, universities and jobs

IT skills are amongst Europe's best - as befits a country which in the 80s and 90s was one of the world's global video and CD pirates

"Cyrillic", you should know, refers to [one of two "Greek" monks](#) (the other is Methodius) who invented the Cyrillic alphabet and language. The adjective is in parenthesis simply because territory (let alone history) has been hotly-disputed in the Balkan area - to put it mildly.

Boundaries have been constantly adjusting.....and are still disputed - particularly those of Macedoniafrom whose loins, remember, both Alexander the Great and Attaturk sprang! I liked this quote from a book written in 1931 (Meet Bulgaria)

Bulgaria has changed its size and shape many times during the last century, stretching out and contracting like an agitated amoeba — if that famous animal ever gets agitated. Many official and unofficial bodies and individuals have drawn Bulgaria's boundaries. The unofficial maps have been prepared in professors' studies or in diplomatic chancelleries and have always been comparatively large.

The official maps have been traced on battle fields with bayonets and in most cases have been small and much hacked up. The one which Bulgaria is now wearing is among the most shrunken she has ever had to squeeze into and the whole nation complains that it is entirely too little — that it doesn't fit at all. It was presented to her in Paris somewhat over a decade ago and is of the same general style as those worn by Germany, Austria and Hungary. I am disclosing no secret when I say that there is no Bulgarian who believes that the map making season in the Balkans is closed.

(These days, however, it is only Greece which queries Macedonia)

Bulgaria has a long and proud history - reaching back 1300 years. Sofia is Europe's second oldest capital.....Tribes and foreign armies have ravaged its territory for thousands of years.....The Isihia music group gives us a [haunting ensemble here of painting and music](#) to help fix that reality in our minds. And a [1980s film about the nation's first ruler - Han Asparuh](#) is a stirring 2 hour view (with sub-titles) which also makes us aware of the emptiness of Hollywood epics.....

The Bulgarians are very proud that they gave Russia its language

And that they had in fact a vast Empire - indeed two!

The [First Bulgarian Empire](#) existed from the 7th to the 10th Century and was the dominant power in the Balkans during this period - particularly under Tsar Simeon.

The [Second Bulgarian Empire](#) existed (roughly) from 1200 - 1400. This may have been the "dark ages" for Europe - but incredible remnants of that period are being discovered every month still in Bulgaria

Although Sofia - Roman "Serдика" (and Europe's second oldest city) - was not then its capital which was, variously, in Pliska, Skopje and Veliko Tarnovo



But before that there was, of course, the.....Roman Empire many remnants of which can be found both in Sofia and along the Danube (a strong frontier) particularly Svishtov.

The Ottoman Empire then blotted Bulgaria out for some 450 years

The Orthodox Monasteries kept the religious flame burning - even although their churches were often (literally) forced underground.

It was the Russians who came to Bulgaria's rescue in the 1870s - with hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers dying in the battles against the Turks which took place in central and eastern Bulgaria

Turkish atrocities aroused European - even British - reactions....

After the Liberation, the country then enjoyed a few decades of "modern bourgeois development"

A wonderful "Revivalist" style of architecture sprung up - remnants of which can still be seen - particularly in Plovdiv and 3-4 villages. Literature and particularly painting flourished. Remember that, until now, the painting of images was forbidden. No wonder that Bulgarian painting exploded in colour at the beginning of the 20th Century!

Churches - even in remote villages - vibrate with almost [erotic pastelling sensibility](#) - and look at the interior of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral whose architect was a Russian, painters Bulgarian but which paid tribute to the Russians, Romanians and Bulgarians who had lost their lives in the struggles of the previous decades...

Things started to go wrong in 1913 when, as part of a complicated series of diplomatic alliances initially against the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan countries first [united with one](#)

[another in a first Balkan War; and then tore each other apart a few months later](#) in a Second Balkan War. Bulgaria lost territory in that second Balkan War.

Overlooking their historic hatred of the Turk and past allegiance to Slavic Russia, Bulgaria entered the [Great War in 1915](#) on the side of the Central Powers with the single objective of reversing the territorial settlements of the 1912-13 Balkan Wars

A nation of less than five million, Bulgaria mobilized an army of 1.2 million soldiers. These troops helped force the Serbian Army to abandon their own country, drove the French and British expeditionary forces back to the Salonika perimeter, participated in the defeat of Rumania, and, for the last year of the war, were the principal sentinels at the Balkan "back door" into central Europe. But playing a major role in a world war proved exhausting for the small country.

By the spring of 1918 food shortages become severe at home and Bulgarian troops had to subsist on a barley bread with straw filler. On 29 September 1918, after their forces collapsed under pressure on the Salonika Front, Bulgaria became the first Central Power to sign an armistice. In three years of war the Bulgarian forces lost a quarter of a million men killed, wounded, or captured.

The Dobrudja area to the south-east of the Danube was ceded to Romania (being returned in 1945)

The aftermath to the Great War saw a [period of great instability](#) - with bombings and assassinations, culminating in [a coup-d'etat in 1923](#) and also 1932.

A nice little article on [Modernism in Bulgarian Architecture](#), however, shows the more stable side..

Bulgaria was technically neutral at the start of the second world war - but did sign a treaty in 1941 which allowed Hitler's troops to cross the country to conquer Greece; and then declared war on the US and the UK

From 1941-44 Sofia was, therefore, bombed very intensively by the Americans and Brits; about a third of the old centre was destroyed - there is a powerful sculpture in the City Park beside the City Art Gallery which marks this

Bulgaria's honour is saved by [their protection of the Jews](#) from Nazi extermination

As if the century had not been vindictive enough, what happened on and after [9 September 1944](#) was quite traumatic.... This is [how Wikipedia tells the story](#)

On 26 August 1944, the government had orally declared Bulgaria's neutrality in the war under the threat of the Red Army's offensive in neighbouring Romania. A government of the [Bulgarian Agrarian National Union](#) (BANU) "Vrabcha 1", until then in opposition, was formed on 2 September 1944, headed by Konstantin Muraviev. It continued the peace talks, declared its support for democratic reforms and ordered the withdrawal of German army troops from Bulgaria. At the same time, the guerilla actions of the partisans did not cease, the alliance with Germany was not disbanded and no attempts were made to normalize the relations with Moscow, forcing the Soviet Union to treat the new government with suspicion. On 5 September 1944, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria.

On 5 September, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party and the general staff of the Popular Liberation Revolutionary Army commenced the planning of a coup d'état. The plan was further detailed on 8 September. According to the plan, the coordinated actions of the partisans, the BWP combat groups and the pro-Fatherland Front army detachments would assume power and effective control



of government during the night of 9 September. The stated goal of the coup d'état was the "overthrowing of the fascist authorities and the establishment of popular-democratic power of the Fatherland Front".

Nobody knows how many Bulgarians lost their lives in the first weeks of the "people's democracy," their only crime being their political opinion or their social position. However, the number of victims of the so-called People's Court, which was created to give legitimacy to the murder of politicians, artists, writers and even physicians considered "dangerous" to the new regime, is well documented. From December 1944 to April 1945 the court issued 9,550 verdicts,

with 2,680 death sentences and 1,921 life terms - the Nuremberg Trials against top Nazis issued just 17 death sentences.

If you are looking for a single day when the Bulgarian political class was decimated with one blow, you get 1 February 1945. On that day the People's Court sentenced to death 67 MPs and 22 ministers who had held office between 1940 and 1944, including the former prime ministers Dobri Bozhilov and Ivan Bagryanov. Also killed were the regents Prince Kiril, Bogdan Filov and General Nikola Mihov, nine secretaries to the palace, publishers and journalists of national newspapers, and 47 generals and senior military.

The victims of the People's Court are just a fraction of the number of Bulgarians who suffered various forms of repression during Communism. Between 1944 and 1989 thousands of opponents of the regime were detained, interned or denied education or work advancement. The reasons for the repression were many and varied: accusations – usually bogus – of espionage and plotting against the Communist state, or opposing the forced collectivisation of agricultural land, or disagreeing with the Bulgarianisation policies toward the country's Muslims. Telling political jokes, wearing mini-skirts, having a "bourgeois" past or the "wrong" relatives could all land you in a labour camp. So could listening to Elvis Presley music. The total number of those repressed between 1944 and 1990 is estimated at about 300,000.

Although conditions eased in the 1970s, two events in the late 1980s are etched in Bulgarian people's minds -

- The unforgivable silence of the authorities after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1987 which resulted in hundreds of deaths and malformations in the country in subsequent years
- The [treatment of the old muslimised ethnic population \(Pomaks\)](#) who in the late 1980s were pressured to take Bulgarian family names. Many left for Turkey but others eke out a living in small villages in the south

Bulgaria had a rather slow and quiet response to the fall of the Berlin Wall with the communists being very slow to relinquish power.....there's a [little article](#) here about that

In its place came lawlessness - I remember even in 2002 being issued by the border authorities at the Danube with a leaflet warning me not to stop my car for policeman on the roads - on the basis that they would probably be hijackers.....By 2007 this was a thing of the past...

And no heads fell for [the iniquities of the communist rule](#) - indeed many people nowadays are nostalgic for those days....

The country has experienced serious emigration of its best and brightest. The population has fallen [from 9 million to less than 7 million](#) in the last 20 years

The judicial system is still unreformed... and corruption rampanthere's the [latest EC report on all that](#). Friends who try to win EU Structural Fund contracts tell me that 20% "under the counter" payments are needed for the privilege....when they phone to inquire about bids they are often told not to bother as the bid outcome has already been sorted out by the key players....

Bulgarians love their countryside - some parts of which they [endow with mystic qualities](#). They are also great fans of faith healers and remedies. Sofia has quite a few vegetarian shops and restaurants - with fantastic fresh brown bread!!!

I comment later that the country seems to have produced more painters per head of population than most others - I doubt whether it would be possible to produce such a list of Scottish painters! And I have slowly realised the same is true of sculptors - whose artistry I have only recently begun to appreciate. I haven't found a good resource yet about them on the internet - but [here is a little booklet](#) on some modern sculptors.

There is a great tradition in ceramics which is kept alive by contemporary artist - old and young. They have a freshness which you don't often see. Central Sofia has many delightful small shops [displaying their wares](#) - [even online](#). Carpets too....older classic ones can be picked up (if a bit worn) for a song...

Public transport in Sofia is fantastic; and improving all the time. For 4 euros you buy a "talon" of 10 tickets which gets you on any bus, tram or trolleybus (but only for yourself - don't tear another ticket for anyone travelling with you - if caught, you face a fine! So spend 10 leva for the flexible talon). The incredible new metro has its own tickets which, however, offer only single trips - not return!!!!

More on Historical/political

Initially I could find only one history book but am now beginning to develop the beginnings of a serious library....of which three books are the mainstay -

- "The Rose of the Balkans - a short history of Bulgaria" by Ivan Iltchev (Colibri 2005) - a delightful read (with good graphics) by the Dean of Sofia University who has also produced several other books on modern Bulgarian history
- Short History of Modern Bulgaria RJ Crampton (1987)
- Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria Raymon Detrez (the Scarecrow Press 2006) - an amazing find (thanks to The National Library of Scotland). 900 pages of information (of which no less than 100 pages are a bibliography of books and articles available in the English language!!)



One of the main Sofia thoroughfares is Stamboulski St which I had assumed was a reference to Istanbul (if I had given half a thought to the Ottoman Empire, I should have known better!!). In fact it refers to one of Bulgaria's most prominent 20th Century politicians whose massive statue towers over the entrance to the Opera House -

The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) was a left-populist political party based in the rural areas of Bulgaria. They briefly held power from 1919 to 1923, under the charismatic leadership of Alexander Stamboliski. In 1923, the BANU government was overthrown by a military coup. Stamboliski was arrested and tortured to death.

Bulgarian politics almost a century ago may seem like a somewhat obscure and esoteric subject (unless you are Bulgarian!), but the history of the BANU have broader implications. During the 20th century, modernization have essentially only taken two paths: capitalist modernization or socialist modernization. The latter path eventually proved unviable, unless one counts present-day China as still being socialist. Stamboliski and the BANU attempted a third way to modernization: a path based on neither the bourgeoisie nor "the working class" (actually a socialist state bureaucracy), but rather on the peasantry. They attempted to turn Bulgaria into some kind of non-capitalist, non-socialist system based on peasant private property and cooperatives. The ultimate goal of the BANU was to replace parliamentary democracy with an "estatist" organization based on the professional organizations of peasants, artisans and workers. ("Estatist" as in based on estates.) Apparently, this was a vaguely left-wing version of corporatism.

What makes the BANU interesting, is precisely that their commitment to the peasantry wasn't a call for anti-modernism or Throne and Altar conservative politics. Stamboliski was a freethinker who had studied Darwin, Renan and Bernstein. He opposed both the Bulgarian monarchy, the military and the nationalist wars of expansion carried out by a number of Bulgarian governments. He wanted modernization, but a modernization that would benefit the peasantry rather than squeeze them in the usual fashion.

Stamboliski believed that private property was legitimate as long as it was acquired through individual or family labour. He therefore opposed big landowners and called for a far-reaching land reform. In power,

Stamboliski used the power of the state to carry out a radical redistribution of land. The BANU also encouraged the creation of cooperatives in agriculture, fishing and forestry. The Bulgarian government established a virtual monopoly on foreign trade in grain and tobacco, which led to the peasants getting higher prices for their products. A system of virtual rent controls was instituted to ease the burdens of the homeless after World War One. The government also set up a compulsory labour service to mobilize workers and peasants to build new roads, clean the streets of the towns, etc.

What this shows, of course, is that the idea of a radical redistribution of property without using the power of the state, is utopian. No matter whether the goal is to abolish private property, or merely to redistribute it, the power of the state is necessary. (The only exception would be a situation of general societal breakdown, at which point the local communities would presumably help themselves to whatever part of "big business" happens to be in their backyard.)

Another thing that intrigued me when reading "Peasants in power" was the peaceful foreign policy advocated by the BANU. As already indicated, Stamboliski absolutely opposed the foreign expansionism of the previous Bulgarian governments and their bizarre allies, the terrorist organization IMRO. Opposing the tide of Greater Bulgarian nationalism against Turks, Greeks, Serbs and Rumanians must have been difficult, but Stamboliski stood his ground. Eventually the BANU got the support of a plurality of the Bulgarian voters, who were sick and tired of all the losing wars. In power, Stamboliski called for a Balkan federation and sought rapprochement with Yugoslavia, the traditional enemy of Bulgaria in all things Balkan.

Eventually, Stamboliski and his radical populist regime were overthrown by a bloody right wing coup. That the traditional circles in Bulgaria opposed the BANU is hardly surprising. To them, the BANU was "Bolshevist". The IMRO, a Macedonian terrorist organization with a substantial following in Bulgaria, also opposed the BANU and assassinated several of its ministers already before the coup. The IMRO wanted Bulgaria to attack the Serbs or the Greeks (or both!) in order to regain all of Macedonia for a Greater Bulgaria, a bizarre but typically nationalist project. Russian White Guards (stationed in Bulgaria at the prodding of the Allies) had been implicated in an earlier coup attempt, and resented Stamboliski's thaw with the Soviet Union.

Tragically, the BANU was also opposed by the other left-wing parties. The Broad Socialists (Social Democrats) opposed the BANU. So did the Communist Party, which viewed the conflicts between Stamboliski and the right-wing as an internal "bourgeois" conflict. Only after the overthrow and murder of Stamboliski did the Communists enter an alliance with the BANU, but their joint uprising against the new regime failed completely, and brutal repression followed.

For rather obvious reasons, nobody can tell how world history would have looked like, had a "Green" path to modernization been chosen, rather than the "Blue" or "Red" paths actually followed, or if such a path is even feasible.

Still, "Peasants in power" is an interesting and fascinating read about a little known episode in that world history...

From Review of " **Peasants in power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923**" John Bell (1977)

Other historical books clearly worth reading are -

- [Debating the Past: Modern Bulgarian History: From Stambolov to Zhivkov; Roumen Daskalov \(2011\)](#)
- [Crown of Thorns; the reign of Boris III of Bulgaria 1918-1943 \(1987\)](#)
- [Stefan Stambolov and the emergence of the Bulgarian nation \(1993\)](#)

- [Who Owns the Past?: The Politics of Time in a 'model' Bulgarian Village](#); Deema Kaneff (2006)
- [The Iron Fist](#) Alex Dmitrova (2007)
- [Voices from the Gulag - life and death in communist Bulgaria](#) (1999) looks in harrowing detail at this period of Bulgaria's history
- *Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia* (2014); a very impressive collection of monographs on different aspects of Balkan history eg about commerce between Brasov and Vidin in the 15th century!!
- *Communism versus Democracy Bulgaria 1944-1987*; Nasya Krlevska-Owens (Sofia 2010); which tells a harrowing story - particularly the immediate aftermath of the seizure of power; the savage massacre without trial of tens of thousands of the educated, professional class of Bulgaria leaving indeed only the few who were professed communists or the others who escaped with prison sentences or simply ran.....

It is our fate to be forgotten when we die - but one of the endearing features of present-day central Sofia are the crimson plaques which now grace the street corners, reminding us of the various individuals who played key roles in Bulgaria's history. Not just Tsars and Russian generals but poets, revolutionaries (and their mothers), politicianseven an English one (William Gladstone).

3. The retro charm of Sofia

3.1 Its feel

Sofia is my favourite European City - it has the liveable atmosphere which has disappeared in other capitals - with great parks, restaurants, galleries and public transport - and few high-rise buildings in its centre. I love nothing so much as a brisk morning walk/cycle to the pool/fitness; browsing in one of the great vegetable markets or second-hand bookshops; a chat with my gallery friends; often livened by a shot of Kalyshka Rakia... and a lazy dinner with a superb Bulgarian wine



People tend to be dismissive of Sofia and it certainly lacks the grandeur, if not monumentality, of Bucharest buildings. But the old centre compensates by retaining a certain feel of the pre-war period.....

- Sofia Enigma and Stigma (Enthusiast 2011) - Ljubomir Milchev - a little book which contains evocative black and white photos of old, crumbling buildings in Sofia;
- *"Time and Beauty; art nouveau in the Bulgarian cities"* ed Vittore Collina (2014) - a lovely booklet produced with great care and thought - a real labour of love
- *"A Walk in the Street of Sofia Guidebook"* (Kras Plus 2002); marvellous bilingual history of the 6 parts of central Sofia for those who want to appreciate the city's singularity by foot.. Sadly I've not so far been able to find another copy in the bookshops...but you can get a sense of the area from the album named "walk around the flat" in my [flickr account](#)
- Tourist Guide of Sofia - produced by the Tourist Office, with the younger market in mind

The city has an old-fashioned gentility - mainly from the tiny shop and gallery units of its centre with both young and old eking out a fragile existence but at least one whose rhythm they control. With its parks and buskers with their retro music; narrow streets, small shops and atmosphere, the owners on the doorstep with a coffee and cigarette talking with friends, Sofia should be one of the pin-ups of the slow food movement.

The modest grid-iron system which is its centre developed after the 2nd WW bombing; has kept cars in their place; and created small spaces which old and young alike have been able to use to pursue their dreams - whether shops where they sell the clothes they design themselves, micro art galleries, tobacco, wine cellars, great ceramics.

Of course the downside of such charm is that those who run the tiny vegetable, dressmaker, thread, tobacco shops and various types of galleries are just eking out a living. But the spirit they represent is priceless - and deserves more support.



I also have a mountain house in the Romanian Carpathians and therefore have [a term of comparison](#) - which strengthens my conviction that Bulgaria has something very special to offer the visitor.

Both countries have superb landscapes - and they are both proud peoples. Somehow, the Bulgarian pride is simpler. Since Winston Churchill's put-down in the late 1940s of the Leader of the Labour Party - "a modest man - he has a lot to be modest about", I hesitate to use that adjective. But that is part of the attraction of the Bulgarians - they are not

pretentious and have not spoiled the glorious heritage and landscape (and wines!) with which their country is endowed.

Despite (or perhaps because of?) its size, Bulgaria seems more difficult to penetrate than its larger (and still estranged) neighbour to the north but painting is still, I have discovered, a good route to use to explore its interior....Remarkably, its artists had only some 60 years of freedom before they were faced from 1944 with the [dictats of communist rulers](#) and, even today, art history in the country is shaped by figures who had power in that 45 year period.

[Bulgarian caricaturists](#) of the first half of the 20th century were amongst the world's best - names such as Alexander Bozhinov, [Ilyia Beshkov](#), Marco Behar, Stoiyan Venev and Boris Angeloushev - many of them good left-wingers in the 1930s who found themselves in positions of authority a decade later. I would love to have witnessed a conversation between Beshkov, for example, and artists such as Boris Denev, Constantin Shtarkelov and Nikolai Boiadjiev who were [forbidden from painting](#).

There is still all too little written (even in Bulgarian) about this period of the country's life.... All the more delightful therefore to discover recently a small book about the friendship between Beshkov and a journalist refugee from Nazi German Jacob Altmaier. The [full text of the book](#) by Maria Ovcharova is online - unfortunately missing the Beshkov caricatures....

Despite the continuing political silences about the 42 years Bulgaria spent under communism, the 20th century can still be felt in Sofia -

I bought recently a (copy of) a little 1947 woodcutting of the part of Vasil Levsky Street which has the University at the end, complete with a couple of cars and a horse and cart - part of a series dictator Georgi Dimitrov apparently commissioned from artists then,

That was the same day I came across a lovely 1935 landscape by Boris Denev - banned by the communist regime from paintings after 1944 - which had been lying in a house for several decades. It still has the typical white frame used in the 1940/1950s.

And one of my prize possessions is this 1942 journal on every page of which are several pencilled figures - clearly the work of Ilyia Beshkov, the famous caricaturist.



3.2 Seeing is believing

The ultimate source, of course, of divine authority these days is.....videos! Just a few samplers -

- [A walk through the street of Sofia](#) - gives a good sense of the city's narrow street (although I rarely see rain!). It starts, I think in Gladstone St and then turns into Hristo Botev Bvd and heads for the famous "Five Corners"....Apart from the annoying noise of the trundling camera (??), the video does, however, conspire to miss everything of any importance - indeed walks right past the Nevsky and the Russian churches without showing us a glimpse!!! Quatres points!!
- [A glimpse of Sofia](#) - which actually focuses only on churches! cinqs points!
- [From Bulgaria with love](#) - very low, boring voice but great singing - but, after 12 minutes, there is a 5 minute section only in bulgarian - then shots of Veliko Tarnovo - at 24 mins again only BG about Melnik. Six points!
- [History of sofia](#); this is more like a guide - although the voice grates!! 7 points!
- [Buzludzha communist relic](#); most amazing video of a decaying communist monument at the top of the southern Bulgarian mountains - Huit points!!
- [Are there no happy Bulgarians?](#); wonderful sculpture from a Bulgarian friend Spartak Dermendjiev
- For a rather different perspective try [this video about the Thracians](#)
- There is a great old [Pathe News item](#) on the country here - with such a juicy accent!

3.3 Last Sanctuaries - Sofia's bookshops

Sofia is blessed not only with good restuarants and many delightful small art galleries but has several quite excellent bookshops where you can find English books,

I once called art galleris the [last sanctuaries of originality](#) - I was thinking of small galleries (such as those in Sofia) not the palaces which do so much money-laundering globally and generally fronted bywankers!

But, in fact, it is the **second-hand bookshops** which really deserve that name. Where you can find lovely or rare editions of books for a song - books which have often taken a lifetime to produce and which often have a history, with a handwritten inscription from the 60s.....

Whether the books are technically old or "new", they have arrived on the shelves at the moment I happen on them by a magical process of serendipity. Even the [knigomania chain](#) has not yet reached the stage of having "in-your-face" piles of the latest best-seller and its (small) range of current affairs titles always offer a new find.

The delightful small [Petr Beron](#) corner shop at 2 Shipman St has an owner with an intuitive feel for what the browser with English tastes might find interesting. I emerged recently with [The Monuments Men](#) (the link gives a typically caustic New Yorker review) and [Why Nations Fail - the](#)

[origins of power, prosperity and poverty](#); which got [a long review here](#). The previous week it had been with a couple of Bulgarian writers (Zaharieva).

[Elephant Bookstore](#) is further along Shipman St - almost at the Grav Ignatieff tram street. Their shelves offer real wonders - I can generally unearth a lovely old hardback - eg (on my last trip) a typically idiosyncratic and evocative insight into Bulgaria in its last few months under communism -



Bulgaria - a Travel Guide (1989) by Philip Ward; Alan Clark's [Last Diaries](#) (2002) and *The Picador Book of Journeys* (2001) ed by Robyn Davidson.

Another favourite old book dive (particularly for books on 20th century Bulgarian art) on Vasil Levski 87, side-on to the massive monument to the Russian soldiers. It doesn't even have a name (I asked - and got a shrug of the shoulders!). It's off the main Boulevard, hidden down a little passage-way but recognisable by the boxes of books at the corner.

This time I couldn't believe my luck - I emerged with

7 old art books (One on the art of Bulgarian woodcutting) and a 1965 book on Veliko Tarnovo - only 60 euros lighter in pocket....

[Alba Books](#) at 38 Ivan Vazov St lies in between these three and is your archetypical antiquarian bookshop with books piled high and a few art lithographs. When I asked if they had any books in English about Bulgarian history, they unearthed a 1920s edition of a bound version of a pamphlet called *Puritans of the Balkans* - which turned out to be an account of the work of American missionaries in this part of the world.....

[The Bulgarian Bookshop](#) offers new books, just along from the Russian Church at 10 Aksakov St, but has the same jumbled atmosphere with books piled hi and threatening to crash to the floor.....

3.4 Eating

Choose from [7 Bulgarian food classics](#). But first, of course, find your restaurant - silly me!! You're spoiled for choice in Sofia!

- For sheer value for money and atmosphere, you can't do much better than the house at the corner of 6th September and Khan Krum Streets. [Divaka](#) is actually a chain of three with the more central (and cavernous) one being just off Vitosha Bvd and Solunska St.
- There is also another chain - *The Happy* - which offers great food and wine - it's always busy but service is fast...



- The [Club of the Architect](#) is the classiest restaurant. Good atmosphere and good prices - in located in the university and diplomatic quarter.
- *The Rocket* offers a great experience (with a retro decor and rakias a speciality) in the gardens at Bvd Dondukov right next door to the Vaska Emanouliwa Art Gallery. Also slightly pricier..
- [Grape Central](#) Tsar Samuel 45 is a new addition to a small street which offers great art experiences. Nice brick décor and a fantastic selection of Bulgarian wines, grouped by Region - with modest eating to match the wine.
- *Made in Home* (Angel Knchev ul. 30A) is one of several vegetarian restaurants (house wine only) with a great atmosphere (for me). It's just off Vitosha.
- *L'Etranger* at Tsar Simeon 78 (just off Marie Luise Bvd and down from the Mosque and Halle) is a delightful small family-owned place. Run by a French chef and his Bulgarian wife, they have a short, carefully chosen menu and great wines selected from small Bulgarian (and French) wineries....
- My favourite is the "Buffet", on Elzah Josif st - next to the Fire Station. Real retro feel, great menu - although the wines are a bit pricey...

3.5 Drinking

The country is famous for its red wines - I remember first coming across them in Oddbins in the 1970s and, indeed, 40 out of the 50 best wines recommended in the little annual "[Divino Guide](#)" are red.

But the whites were the great discovery for me when I first motored through Bulgaria in 2002 on the way to Turkey. I was quite stunned by first the crispness of the vastly underrated Targovishte Muscat (which rightly won a bronze medal in a Paris fair a couple of years back) and then by the sheer variety I was encountering.

Great little [Catalogue of Bulgarian Wine](#) (by T Tanovska and K Iontcheva - annual) which I use to record my impressions. [The Wine Routes of Bulgaria](#) (Vina Zona 2014) is also a nice little - if less technical - addition to the shelves (although with only 64 of the vineyards covered - The Catalogue has almost double that number) No fewer than [66 of the vineyards were presenting](#) on 20-22 November - which means about 400 bottles were waiting to be tasted!!

<http://www.kashkaval-tourist.com/7-unique-bulgarian-wine-varieties-must-taste/>

<http://www.kashkaval-tourist.com/>

<http://bulgariawinetours.com/a-journey-through-bulgarian-wines-my-wine-tasting-experience-in-plovdiv/>

And [Halbite](#) ("beermug") is the place to go if you're a beerdrinker (with some 250 types on offer - 11 draft). The Neofite Rilski one is the one we frequent - a small house in a courtyard....

4. Bulgaria - for those who want to know more

4.1 Books

The quotation on the dedication page poses the critical question - "What kind of knowledge is needed to feed meaningful cross-cultural contacts?" but then fails to mention the linguistic barrier - and what this contributes to our understanding (or rather lack of it!) of a country like Bulgaria.

Just as the google search engine effectively whitewashes our previous generation out of existence even in our own country, so the English language is a powerful sieve which excludes a lot of human experience from our sight.....

[The Rough Guide to Bulgaria](#) contains (at page 461-64 of the link) a list of English books on Bulgaria (many of which are out of print) as well as a useful section on the country's music. I found [a rather fuller list of books here](#).

The Lonely Planet website [could list in 2010 as books worth reading](#) only the 1888 novel "[Under the Yoke](#)" and other novels on the same theme of war with the Turks - and books about gypsies!

Initially only the small [Concise History of Bulgaria](#) was the only history book about Bulgaria I could find listed there in the English language (although [Wikipedia has a long and useful note](#) on the various phases of its history). In Sofia, however, I came across a friendly and aesthetically-pleasing history of Bulgaria "[Rose of the Balkans](#)" by Ivan Iltchev (500 pp; Colibri 2005) which I strongly recommend

Because I have been living in Sofia since 2007 for at least the winters, I have been able to unearth quite a few books you will not find outside Bulgaria for my growing library on things Bulgarian....

- A locally-produced [Bulgaria Tour Guide](#) (Tangra 2006) - a glossy 670 pager with superb small illustrations - is a great buy at only 15 euros.
- [Bulgaria - discover the real Bulgaria](#) (Other Places Travel Guide) by Leslie Strnadel and Patrick Erdley (2012) - not so easy to find since it is a Peace Corps publication. The link is a googlebook one and therefore offers a good read in itself.
- The [Vagabond journal](#) produced by Anthony Georgieff is now publishing superb perspectives into different aspects of the country and its past with great photos and then collecting them in coffee table books eg [Hidden Treasures of Bulgaria](#). Also books dealing with the Jewish and Ottoman heritage....
- [100 Bulgarian National Tourist Sites](#); by A and S Dermendziev (2013) Bulgarian and German only
- *The Danube Riverside Guide* (2011 - one of several regional guides produced by Tangra Publishing)
- *Bulgarian Monasteries* (2004) by [Nikolai Touleshkov, Lyuben Prashkov Ivan Bozhilov](#) Bilingual. Great guide.
- [Companion guide-to-religious-architecture-in-bulgaria-part-one-west-bulgaria](#); J Mineva-Milcheva and E Alexandrova-Koeva (2006) Thorough 460 page analysis of the key features of a small part of the incredible heritage
- This delightful little E-book features some of the [amazing small bed and breakfasts in the countryside you can stay at for a song](#)
- and [this is an interesting article](#) on Bulgaria's cultural heritage

Real treasures - apart from "Rose of the Balkans" - are -

- Ivan Daraktchiev's amazing Bulgaria: Terra Europeensis Incognita gives us 600 pages of superb photographs and provocative (English) text about the history (ancient and recent) and landscape of the country and its relationship with neighbours.
- The owner of Sofia's Neros Gallery, Ruhmen Manov, went one better in summer 2014 with (bilingual) A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria which weighs in at 7 kilos and 700 pages - based on his personal collection of old Bulgarian photos and cultural artefacts. It does indeed give a stunning sense of Bulgaria's more recent history.
- the 600 page Sofia's Mount Athos by Valentina Sharlanova (Drinov Academic Publishing 2013) is a superb study (complete with photos and GPS coordinates) of the 46 monasteries which cluster around Sofia - many since the 14th century.
- "Architecture of the Old Bulgarian Villages"; Stefan Stamov (2006) 288 pages covering 24 of the most famous old villages written by the doyen of Bulgarian writers on architecture. (English edition).
- "The Bulgarian Folk House"; Stefan Stamov (2007) - a more technical complement to his 2006 book (largely Bulgarian) -with wonderful (mainly b/w) illustrations
- Rhodopes; the Sacred Mountain (Club 8 2014); an absolutely wonderful 245 page photographic tribute to the area - with brief text

But we warned, these are heavy volumes and add unwelcome kilos at the airport weigh-in!

More difficult to find are -

- *The Bulgarian Contribution to the World Cultural Heritage* (Sofia 1989) - one of the books unearthed for me by the guy who runs the tiny second hand bookshop in the courtyard of 86 Vasil Levski St. It's a detailed account of The Kazanluk Thracian Tomb; the Madara Horseman; the Boyana Church; the Ivano Rock Churches near Russe; the ancient city of Nessebur and Rila Monastery.
- *You live your life but once - a memoir from Bulgaria*; Dimi Gachev (2012) A marvellous tribute to one man's family, ancestors and friends - [excerpts of which can be found on his website](#) (google translate will help)
- Wooden Folk Houses; Stefan Stamov (2007) 375 pp Unfortunately only in Bulgarian but full of delightful black and white photos of village houses.....

The wooden house represents a source of knowledge not only of the oldest history, architecture and construction, but also of the life, culture and artistic traditions the Bulgarian people. Very often timbered houses mix with wooden frame-built houses. This study examines that house where the residential part is built only of wood, i. e. the floors, walls, ceilings and roofs are of wooden beams and planks. When the house becomes two floors, foundations, basement parts of or the entire ground floor is built of stone, but the floor in the living process that takes place - bedrooms, kitchens, balconies, is just wood. If the ground floor has living quarters, they are also made of wood - the inside is coated with shingle, and the walls of the courtyard or the street are planks.

- *Medieval Melink - from the end of the 12th century to the end of the 14th century*; Elena Kostova (American Research Centre 2013)

4.2 Travelogues

The Balkans have for the past few centuries been a source of great fascination for west Europeans. For intrepid travellers from the 18th century at least, this was the furthest extremity of the world that they could reasonably attempt.....[The Debated Lands](#) by Philip Hammond (2002) looks at about 500 books written by these travellers - first at the motifs of discord, savagery, backwardness and obfuscation which characterise the 19th century British travel books about the area.

"[Danubian Principalities; the frontier lands of the Christian and of the Turk](#)" (1854), for example, is written by a British engineer who found himself in the land just south of the Danube in what is now North-East Bulgaria and offers a view just 20 years before Bulgaria was liberated from the "[Turkish Yoke](#)" There then followed a strand of writing in the late 1920s which, as Hammond puts it, "took the romanticisation into deeper territory - with a revolt against western modernity and mass society -

From the end of the First World War until the outbreak of the Second, travellers were finding in this previously depraved corner of Europe..... "a peace, harmony, vivacity and pastoral beauty in utmost contrast to the perceived barrenness of the West, and which produced benefits for those weary of modernity that ranged from personal rejuvenation to outright revelation".

According to this alternative balkanism, violence had disappeared from the region, savagery became tamed, obfuscation turned to honesty and clarity, and the extreme backwardness that had formerly been the gauge of Balkan shortcoming was now the very measure by which it was extolled. For many travelers, any mystery that did remain around the geographical object became less the marker of a befuddled and dishonest culture than a vital indication of spiritual depth....."

[Meet Bulgaria](#); RH Markham (1932) (who was Balkans correspondent of The Christian Scientist) may be seen as an example. The link gives you the entire book which paints a charming picture of a rural society - and has a complete chapter on painting.

Undoubtedly the most famous travel writer for this part of the world was [Patrick Leigh Fermour](#) (generally known as Paddy) whose trilogy about his walk from the English Channel to Istanbul in 1933 was finished only in 2013! [A Time of Gifts](#) (1977) covered mainly his experience of Nazi Germany; [Between the Woods and the Water](#) (1986) of Hungarian aristocratic houses in Transylvania. But, in 2013, after a 25-year gap, we got [The Broken Road](#) (2013) dealt mainly with the Bulgarian and Greek sections of his trip. Paddy's writing is quite exquisite. He led a very full life - a [website is devoted to his memory](#); and a great biography came out quite recently.

[Rates of Exchange](#) is a novel by Malcolm Bradbury (1982) follows a British linguistics lecturer, Dr. Angus Petworth, on his first ever visit behind the Iron Curtain, to "Slaka".

His arrival, the paranoia of his hosts, the changing moods of his ever-present interpreter and guide, the secret trysts with attractive female novelists, his increasingly desperate attempts to phone home and the fall-off-the-chair-laughing diversion into second-division British diplomatic circles are brilliantly written vignettes that can only be based on real events.

These may or may not of course have happened in Bulgaria - Slaka ultimately borrows a little from every country once behind the Iron Curtain - but anyone who visited before (or even immediately after) 1990's overthrowal of the communists will immediately recognise much of communist-era Bulgaria in Bradbury's book.

Especially good are the descriptions of the hotels: dark wood everywhere, omnipresent men in long coats reading newspapers, peroxide-blondes smoking at lobby bars, terrible service and Byzantine bureaucracy.

And Philip Ward produced in 1989 a travelogue which captured a sense of what it was like for a tourist in its last days of communism - "*Bulgaria - a Travel Guide*". I unearthed it in a Sofia Bookshop in early 2015. Ward is a prolific travel writer - books on about 20 countries - but I can't find out anything about him.....I doubt he is the [librarian Philip Ward](#) who has produced the book on the greatest 500 books of the world! But the googlesearch did turn up this [fascinating modern odyssey](#)

[Imagining the Balkans](#) is a book by a Bulgarian anthropologist Maria Todorova which analyses travel books of the past few centuries about the region and writes that

In the approach to the First World War specific countries were embraced by economic and military alliances and some countries acquired what has been called a "pet state" status.

[Todorova](#) summarises the "pet state" approach to south-east Europe as consisting of -

"the choosing from amongst the Balkan states a people whose predicaments to abhor, whose history and indigenous leaders to commend, whose political grievances to air, and whose national aspirations to advocate". In this way Montenegrins, Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Albanians were all, at different times, picked out for laudatory comment.

4.3 Stereotypes

National stereotypes are....well....[stereotypes](#).....so get over it!!

Ivan Daraktchiev is a remarkable Bulgarian émigré whose detailed and superbly illustrated [Bulgaria: Terra Europeansis Incognita](#) has a lot to say about Balkan "mentalities". It is a quite unique book (entirely in English) which shares pride of place in my library (with an even larger book of Ruman Manov's collection of Bulgarian memorabilia). Indeed the 2 books complement one another beautifully....

Ivan tells the story of how the country came into being and developed - with passion and concern for detail. Archaeology, history, architecture, landscape, cultural, political, economic and even dietary analysis... all loom large in the book which would make the centrepiece for an incredible residential Balkan seminar somewhere.....Chapter 22 is on the Bulgarian cultural contribution to the Balkans; chapter 23 on the "anthropomorphic characteristics of the typical Bulgarian" and chapter 24 on "Balkan national characters" (there are 43 chapters)

Part II of his book (Modern day Bulgaria) has the magnificent sub-title "*Paradise for crooks and Hell for ordinary people*". If you read only one book this year - read this one!! It is well organised and easy on the eye.....

In a way it is a salutary challenge to my own - the one, dear reader, you are now flicking through...We both share the same objective - to help the average European better understand what (let alone where) Bulgaria is but he uses multiple lens (to my limited focus) and speaks from the heart (mine is a more visual appreciation)

The opening pages of my book poses the question of how an outsider can possibly hope to penetrate the soul of another country.....Well.... Ivan Daraktchiev has not only achieved this for his own country but has set a standard to which more writers will hopefully aspire but very few will achieve....

Richard Lewis' 600-plus page opus on the world's cultures - [When Cultures Collide](#) - is as technical and objective an assessment of national characteristics as you can get. He has this to say about the Bulgarians -

Bulgarians differ considerably from other Slavs in their values and communication style, probably because of their origins. In general they are cooler and more pragmatic than many Slavs, particularly when compared with Serbs. Quiet and soberness are valued; you will see little of the hotheaded discussion or noisy public disputes that are only too common in Belgrade. They do, however, share with other Slavs a widespread feeling of pessimism about national helplessness.

In general, Bulgarian values tend to be rural, with homespun virtues, as one might expect from people living in a predominantly agricultural society - eg

- *Disciplined; sober*
- *Pragmatic; cautious*
- *persistent and stubborn;*
- *good organizers*
- *industrious; determined*
- *steady, with stamina;*
- *suspicious but tolerant of foreigners*
- *animosity toward Turks;*
- *inventive*
- *highly literate;*
- *thorough*

Leadership Style and Status

Bulgarian social barriers are few because of the lack of hereditary nobles. Although a wide range of people can aspire to leadership, no outstanding political or business leaders have emerged during the last decade; national pessimism and self-doubt hinder their development. In business, the future Bulgarian manager is likely to be less autocratic than Serbian or Greek top executives. Bulgarian employees are more passive than Serbs, Croats or Romanians.

Space and Time

Bulgaria is not an overcrowded country, but when engaged in interesting conversation, they sit closer to their interlocutor than would a Northern European. In public there is little pushing or shoving and lines are orderly. Bulgarians are more punctual than most Slavs, though bureaucrats usually keep people waiting. On the surface, Bulgarians show little sense of urgency.

Other Balkan peoples consider them slow-moving. Patience is certainly a virtue in Bulgaria, and it will be required of you—if you wish to achieve your ends, that is.

Communication Pattern

In comparison with the South Slavs, Bulgarians are reticent and reserved in the early stages of acquaintance. In this they resemble the Czechs and Slovenians. Before giving full expression to their feelings or opinions, Bulgarians engage in a series of preliminary encounters, during which they sound out and size up (albeit in a friendly manner) their conversation partners.

During this period they are decidedly less flowery or rhetorical in their speech than the Yugoslavs, Romanians or Hungarians. At this stage, it is very difficult to extract opinions or attitudes from them. When this exploratory period has passed, Bulgarians open up to display a modicum of quiet charm and make their requests in a circuitous manner, avoiding confrontation whenever they can.

The Bulgarian language, being Slavic, is rich in vocabulary, similes, metaphors, symbolism and allegory. The better linguists among them enrich their English with the same tools. They enjoy conversation—an art for them—but are less prone to exaggeration than South Slavs or other Mediterranean people. Bulgarians, like the Greeks, are famous for their unusual manner of saying yes and no. Nodding the head up and down signifies a negative. Shaking it from side to side means yes. The Bulgarians are well aware that this is the reverse of others' body language and sometimes nod in the Western European or American manner, which might be confusing.

Listening Habits

Bulgarians are excellent listeners. They interrupt their compatriots rarely, foreigners hardly ever. Their attentiveness denotes their proclivity toward sizing up the speaker. In general, they respect Western opinions, though they do not always place the right connotation on what is said. A few minutes after absorbing a presentation or new idea, they will give a modicum of feedback, but they will not reveal the full extent of their reactions.

Behaviour at Meetings and Negotiations

Meetings with Bulgarians are generally satisfactory affairs; a win-win goal combined with a solid, conservative approach will give you the feeling of steady progress and trust. Business in Bulgaria is rarely rushed. Goals are generally set in a slow, deliberate manner, and you need to allow plenty of time for Bulgarians to reach them. Endemic bureaucracy will do nothing to speed the process up. Keep in mind, though, that Bulgarians have an inner urge to succeed; patience can work wonders. Initially, at meetings, Bulgarians exercise considerable reserve and hedge their options as long as you allow them to. Their requests will be made in an indirect and circuitous manner. Their reactions to your requests will also be circuitous.

This does not imply negativity, but Byzantine habits that have little to do with straightforwardness.

Formal initial period of reserve and reticence

- use titles
- difficult to extract
- sounds out and sizes up opponents opinions and attitudes
- makes requests in circuitous manner
- hedges options
- uses charm
- no confrontation
- tries for win-win
- reaches pragmatic conclusion

Nationals from Norway, the Netherlands and the United States can get irritated with what they see as "deviousness," playing their cards close to their chest. It is unlikely that Bulgarians, however sincere, will depart from this practice.

They respond well to Westerners who give early evidence of trustworthiness.

Their indirectness causes them to employ a roundabout approach to many issues, especially determining price or the bottom line. Calculation of profit does not come easily to them, particularly the Western meaning of profit. Most successful businesses in Bulgaria depend on a network of connections and the exchange of favours. Go-betweens are often necessary, especially when gifts or "facilitation" fees come into question.

As Francis Urquhart (in The House of Cards) might say - but I couldn't possibly comment!!"

4.4 Websites

As the owner of two websites, I am now a bit suspicious of the motives which lie behind 99% of websites. They are either commercial or ideological. It's amazing that I realised this only recently when I was setting up my first custom-designed one last year.....In principal, university websites, of course, should be free of such pressures but, in practice, the neo-liberal push has perhaps affected them even more.....

However the websites offered here are, for the most part, tourist information sites about which we are (like estate agents) warned in advance!

- [Visit Sofia](#)
- Sofia [City Info Guide](#)
- [Bulgaria Travel](#) - nice site of a typical tourist agency
- [Photo library of the Danube Region](#) - superb resource left from a typical short-term EC project
- <http://danube-raft.eu/category/post-format-gallery/> - ditto
- <http://www.bulgarianmonastery.com/> - a good example (I think) of a public-private venture. Good resource. [Further info and pics here](#)
- [La Belle Epoque](#); the Sofia end of a great website

There's even a [site which identifies Sofia's mounuments](#).....including homes of classical painters...
[Apart from me](#), there only seems one other ex-pat blogger in Bulgaria - [A Letter from the Back of Beyond](#)

4.5 Bulgarian Literature

Two classics are -

- "[Under the Yoke](#)" by Ivan Vazov (1888). This best-known and best-loved Bulgarian novel does not - typically! - figure on the English google search machine - save for a scanty four line entry on Wikipedia. Its plot can be read on [this university essay](#)
- [Bai Ganyo: Incredible Tales of a Modern Bulgarian](#) By Aleko Konstantinov (1895) about which a reviewer says -

Konstantinov writes each vignettes as if it were the retelling by one of the men in his close circle of friends. Each anecdote has a style that is slightly different and nicely underlines the premise of a group of friends exchanging tales. There is a breeziness and chattiness that provides the same feeling as the best late night discussions with friends in a cafe.

The vignettes are divided in two sections though they were originally published in various periodicals and collections. Part 1 contains tales of Bai Ganyo in Europe outside of Bulgaria. Konstantinov has taken the Bulgarian stereotype that Bai Ganyo represents and turned it to his own ends. At times deceitful, small-minded and miserly, Ganyo is also irreverant, charming, rascally, and fun. Konstantinov was looking at the best and worst of what he saw in his fellow Bulgarians as they experienced their national growing pains once leaving Ottoman rule. His writing seemed to imply hope and good humor mixed in with this his critical social commentary.

More modern

- Elisabeth Kostova's The Historian (2005) is a Gothic novel which takes in both Bulgaria and Romania (as well as France, thanks to the Bogomils)
- Street without a Name - childhood and other misadventures in Bulgaria ; Kapka Kassabova (Portobello Books 2009) - several of whose other novels are also available in English
- Circus Bulgaria; Deyen Enev (Portobello Books 2010)
- Nine Rabbits; by Virginia Zaharieva (Istros 2012) - a very nice-looking collection of memoirs and poetry
- the fascinating memoir replete with photos - You Live your Life But Once - A Memoir from Bulgaria by Dimi Gachev (2012)
- East of the West ; by Miroslaw Penkov (Sceptre 2012)

4.6 Images

Black and white photography is a neglected art-form -masters of the genre were [Ansel Adams](#), Henri [Cartier-Bresson](#), Robert [Capa](#), Robert [Doisneau](#), George [Brassai](#) and [Andrei Kertesz](#).

[Bulgaria's best photographer Ivo Hadzhimishev](#) recently produced a great monograph "Stoyan Sertev (1906-1974) An Epoch in Black and White ". It's a book of superb black and white photographs of the period (including delightful shots of the country's best loved painters Nikola Taney) which have taken the breath away of friends I have shown it to. Here is Taney with an actress friend in 1947 at Sozopol. Others show sculptors working on the monumental work of the period.

Stoyan Sertev was actually a musician whose other passion was the camera. His huge archive has kept hundreds of



frames from 1939 till the end of his life. He mainly shot works of art and their creators, architectural projects, theatrical and opera performances.

Ivo Hadzhimishev was responsible for an exhibition on his work at the National Gallery late last year (and also the catalogue) and says about the latter:

"The images that we can see in front of us have passed the test of time - they have emerged from oblivion, and, with them or because of them, a multitude of Bulgarian artists and intellectuals who have left a trace in Bulgarian and European culture

have returned and taken their place in the image memory of Bulgaria. These photographs have been lived through. They have been created first and foremost by the heart and spirit - and that is their value!"

Bulgarian National Radio provided recordings of "Avramov" quartet from the Gold Fund for the audio disc accompanying the edition and Alexander Sertev's family.

The book gives an amazing feel for an era and some of the personalities which dominated it - particularly poignant in view of the traumatic events of that period. The book deserves a higher profile - significant that my friends had never seen a copy.....

I find it so important to have such personal reminders of my favourite artists. It is one thing to see their paintings and some text about them - quite another to see their photos, particularly if animated - or sometimes better - caricatures!

The work of other good Bulgarian photographers can be seen in the books highlighted in section 3.1 eg Nikolay Genev who masterminded the book on the Rhodopes.

And one of my amazing finds on the internet was a dissertation entitled [Images of the Peasant: nation and modernity in 20th Century Bulgaria](#)....each of whose initial chapters focuses on

an important person, movement or organization which best seems to articulate Bulgaria's evolving sense of itself and its place on the edge of Europe. Beginning with a background chapter on the 1878-1917 period, I trace the foundation and development of ethnographic display, representations of peasants in the interwar educational press, campaigns to improve village hygiene and culture, alpine tourism, and the ever-changing image of peasants in propaganda from the years of agrarian rule in the 1920s through the early decades of communism.

Another dissertation - [The Conformists - creativity and decadence in the bulgarian cinema 1945-1989](#) by one Evgenija Garbolevsky (2011) casts a useful eye on Bulgarian cinema during the communist period-

My research focuses on the development of Bulgarian film between 1944 and 1989, as the youngest and most dynamic medium during the period. I explore several forms of subversion, such as decadence, silence and irony, among others, which fostered the creative imagination of the intellectual elite, and made the film art successful. I search for resilience in the oeuvres, in the operation of the institutions, and by looking at the views of the filmmakers and the works of the film critics.

I argue that the Bulgarian filmmakers, similar to their counterparts across the Eastern Bloc, vigorously resisted fitting into the role of lackeys of the Communist regime. Instead, the cineastes articulated their personal visions in their oeuvres by developing aesthetic practices and coded language, expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo, and communicating their complex political and cultural views to the audiences.

The filmmakers eluded censors while including the spectators as accomplices. The tension between rebellion and conformism in the cinematic discourse was intense. Despite the powerfully oppressive cultural policies of the regime, the cineastes succeeded loading their works with subversive messages. Regardless of the ideological straightjacket imposed on them, they sublimated their artistic passions and creative impulses, protested, and mocked the Establishment.

4.7 Hearing - Bulgarian Music

The country- and sea-side of Bulgaria is wondrous - as are its grapes and food....But utterly distinctive is [its music](#) - whether vocal or instrumental.

Its [women's singing tradition](#) is positively ethereal - and indeed earned it a place on one of the first satellites circulating the earth! Here's a contemporary [young woman singing a solo](#); and here also [a duet](#).

And this looks a marvellous study of the musical tradition -

[Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition](#); DA Buchanan (2006)

Thanks to the surfing for this section, I came across a group until now unknown to me - Isihia who use a variety of traditional instruments to create a great sound. Here for example is one called [Transfiguration](#). And they are the backing to this [superb photoshoot of rural churches](#)



4.8 Contemporary politics

If I surf/roam energetically enough, I'm sure I will find a lot of useful stuff on the internet written by Bulgarian American academics on the contemporary scene.... The only Bulgarian intellectual, however, whose political writings I know is [Ivan Krastev](#) who seldom writes about Bulgaria. Bulgaria does not seem to have a [Tom Gallagher](#) - an outsider able to cast a caustic eye over recent events.

The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism; shared political irresponsibility; collective academic authorship (Sofia 2014) tells how Bulgaria coped with the mechanism that the EC put in place at the 2004/7 period of purgatory was ending for it and Romania - but with strong doubts in Brussels about the actual respect for the rule of law in practice in these two countries. Such scepticism was justified and only Romania, in the past 2 years, has shown signs of real judicial reform....

PART II

DAUNDERING IN BULGARIA

"Daunder".... "to stroll, to saunter, to walk aimlessly, idly, or uncertainly, to wander".

lowland Scots



Part II is an account of my serendipitous discoveries over the past five years as I have daundered through Bulgaria's galleries and bookshops and chatted with friends - always with and often about wines.....

The text is taken from the blog to which an allusion is made in section 1.4 - my [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) and begins in October 2010, some three years after I first started to live in Sofia....

Of course, blogging is seen by many as a bit narcissistic- a reflection of the "selfie" age we live in...But there are blogs....and blogs....Self-indulgent "look at me!" ones and blobs of erudite text which few can understand.....And it can get you into trouble One academic blogger, famously, found himself out of work as a result of his blogging (in the early days) and wrote to tell the tale - in [A Blogger's Manifesto](#)

I would like to hope that readers come to my site looking for some originality - be it the *diversity of the topics (and experiences)* the posts deal with; *the thematic summaries* (eg on memoirs or mountain villages); *the range of the references* in the hyperlinks; the glimpses of *rarely seen painting traditions* and, who knows, perhaps even the *celebration of good writing*.

One writer offers no less than [15 justifications for why people should blog](#) - the first four seem to me particularly important -

1. You'll become a **better thinker**. Because the process of writing includes recording thoughts on paper, the blogging process makes you question what you thought you knew. You will delve deeper into the matters of your life and the worldview that shapes them.

2. You'll become a **better write** - once, that is, you start to reread your material or get feedback which shows your text was ambiguous...

3. You'll live a **more intentional life**. Once you start writing about your life and the thoughts that shape it, you'll begin thinking more intentionally about who you are, who you are becoming, and whether you like what you see or not. And that just may be reason enough to get started.

4. You'll develop an eye for meaningful things. By necessity, blogging requires a filter. It's simply not possible to write about every event, every thought, and every happening in your life. Instead, blogging is a never-ending process of choosing to articulate the most meaningful events and the most important thoughts. This process of choice helps you develop an eye for meaningful things.

A blogpost may have a date on it but that is the day the post was published. The experience - or sequence of thoughts - it marks may have been the previous day, year or decade. In that sense it's not like a diary entry - it's almost as if I have a record of my brainscanning action for a significant part of the past five years.....And, as our thoughts wander, so the posts may include brief references to other topics... Hyperlinks are now enormously helpful for both memory and information retrieval.

Friday, October 29, 2010

Vegetable markets

Vegetable markets are always good at this time of year - but Bulgarian and Romanian ones particularly so with the richness of their produce shown at best in the sunny, blue skies. But it is Bulgarian vegetables which are, rightly, famed here for their superiority (with the plain between Georgiu and Bucharest being populated by Bulgarian vegetable growers). The year I spent in Sofia I lost all my bad cholesterol thanks to the vegetable regime I had - if it was too early for their superb large tomatoes (threatened, I'm told, by EU regulations) and leeks, then Turkish and Greek vegetables rolled up easily from over the borders).

Sofia, in my view, should be one of the pin-ups of the slow food movement. The modest grid-iron system which is its centre developed after the 2nd WW bombing; has kept cars in their place; and created small spaces which old and young alike have been able to use to pursue their dreams - whether shops where they sell the clothes they design themselves, micro art galleries, tobacco, wine cellars .

Only in Sofia and Tashkent could I boast my own wine merchant - in Sofia a tiny step-down cellar on Bvd Stamboulska which had a few barrels and cases of select wine at such reasonable prices (in Tashkent a medical doctor who was experimenting in Pashkent - an hour's drive from Tashkent - with mountain herbs and wines and brought bottles of the latter to me weekly to taste). Perhaps, however, I have now at last found one here in Romania. Although the area around the Bucuresti Gara de Nord has various wine shops with wine from the barrel, none compares with the small wine cellar I found recently in Rasnov (between Brasov and Fundata). They offer wines from my favourite area - Dealul Mare - just north of Ploiesti - and the dry whites and reds are quite spectacular at less than 2 euros a litre)



The open market in central Sofia (down from the mosque and synagogue) is in a really down-at-heel area which I feel will soon spring up again like the some of the old Viennese market squares I saw 20 years ago. Unlike Bucharest, it has quite a few Arab shops where incredible ingredients can be bought. One of the other (many) delights of Sofia are the serious coffee-drinking cafes (particularly the smoking one behind the National Art Gallery) - or of the sight of people carrying their coffee in the street. I have never been a smoker - but I feel that the anti-smoking drive has gone too far!

One final comment about vegetables. I remember very vividly from my childhood my mother's jam-making. It is something which I therefore respect - and which I am so pleased to see continued here in Romania. At this time of the year it is something which Daniela (who normally leaves the cooking to me) spends time on. As she says, it is one of the ways her parents kept the family alive in winter. It reminds me of one of the jokes I read in the Ben Lewis book on [Hammer and Tickle](#) I am now reading - "why was Ceaucescu particularly keen on the first May celebrations?" Because he wanted to see how many Romanians had survived the winter! And, while we're on the subject of agriculture, here is an [excellent post](#)

Sunday, January 30, 2011

[Le Flaneur](#)

Back into the tiny gallery on San Stefano St (at what I think is the north-east corner of Doctor's Sq at the University area) to have another look at the large Tomev coastscape painting. Then into the marvellous Alexander Nevsky church and am shocked to see the deterioration in the Nouveaux Arts paintings - many of which have large patches of white (dampness?) spreading downwards.

I stroll to the City Gallery to try to buy another copy of their large catalogue which has a (black and white) reproduction of every painting they have in stock. Only to find that they have some sort of problem with their little shop and they can't sell its books! All that seems to be missing is a key - and the authority and/or the goodwill for the 2 people lounging at the reception! It reminds me of the situation in Bucharest where - despite the cutbacks - there are apparently many small heritage buildings and facilities with surplus staff.

I have a nice wander around a (quiet) centre - wondering once again why the young Sofians profess to disliking the place. To me it's a painter's paradise - not just the friendly little galleries but also the charm of the urban landscape with a mixture of old houses and 4 storey blocks - the space between always revealing a nice perspective. And almost no high rises - as if the supremely ugly 20 story M-tel block on Hristov Botev opposite the majestic beauty of the Ministry of Agriculture building is there to serve as a warning to modernists. The 2 towers of the Ministry building are unique for me. Sadly, however, there is a huge hole in the ground on the corner with Macedonskiya Bvd.

A visit to the small music shop at the end of Solunska St (beside the Methodist church) confirms my fears about the consequences of the change in ownership - a year ago it had in the basement one of the best collections of classical music I had ever seen and now that is gone and the choice much restricted. I need music when I'm working or reading - and forgot to bring some with me. I manage

to find a nice collection of Bassoon concerts and an historical recording of Richard Strauss and Belle Bartok.

The Assen Vasilev gallery is just across the road and, although its stuff is more superficial, I pop in - after all I have bought a couple of things there. And, indeed, I recognise a Mitko Dimitrov painting and indeed pick out one of his without realising it's his - a rather stormy slightly surrealist one with a country church at the top of a hill and a view down a valley to a distant village. Has a nice symbolic touch for me - and only 125 euros. Not quite sure.....My collection is now at the stage I have to be careful about having too many landscapes with houses; I need more seascapes and, above all, paintings with people! And one picture catches my eye - with lots of people in a square, It's by 74 year old Ivan Manoilev - but a bit pricey for me.

14.00 sees me at Konos Gallery for my meeting with Yassen and his other gallery friend who are bringing some more paintings in for me to look at. This time I've brought a wine - I tried to find a Brestovitz but could only manage a Telish. Nothing can be better than a bottle of wine, cheese, bread, friends and paintings! I'm introduced this time to Todor Kodjamanov (born the early part of the 20th century) whose 1940s quiet river scene with some beached canoes has a lovely soft pastel colouring. He's sought after - but I can get this large painting for just under 1000 euros. And there are 2 seascapes for me to inspect - a large Petar Boiadjev and smaller more dramatic Boris Stefchev which I quickly go for.

The Russe Ganchev they have for me is not very exciting - he's on my list because I liked the exhibition of his work I saw 3 years ago at the National Gallery but have not really taken to the 10 or so I have seen so far for sale. The tiny 1911 Alexander Mutafov river scene still entices - but is, of course, pricey. Clutching my Stefchev, I say goodbye with another session fixed for Monday afternoon - when, hopefully, they will have an Emilia Radusheva for me which has something in common with the one I already have (see top).

Amazingly I stumble across two more antique shops on the way home - one in a tiny basement next to the Assen Vasilev gallery. As I emerge, my attention is drawn to a river scene which is hanging outside (!) and it's mine for 100 euros!
So ends a very pleasant Saturday flaneur (wandering).

Today's Observer has a touching article by a young Egyptian woman about the [developments there and in some other countries of the Arab world](#)

Sunday, February 6, 2011

In praise of Sofia

One of my readers was shocked that I was contemplating "leaving Romania" - if only for an 18 month project in Serbia or Bulgaria. As long as I have my house in that beautiful stretch of the Carpathians, it will be difficult to leave the country - although it does stretch my patience a lot. And work in neighbouring countries (Turkey is also still a desirable possibility - although not technically a neighbour) is not inconsistent with continued access to Romania.

But Sofia and Brussels are, for me, the ideal cities - and Sofia has a special charm.. Yesterday was an example. I decided to head out and buy the large book on the graphic artist I had discovered by accident - Boris Angeloushev (1902-1966). I learn that his evocation of the black and white graphics of the early 20th century German artist Kathe Kollwitz arises from the fact that he was trained in Berlin Art Academy in the early 1920 at precisely the period she was most active in the struggle for socialism there.



Since I first discovered her in Berlin in the 1980s I have been a great fan - and recall also the serendipity of my encounter with the marvellous 80 year-old Tina von Schullenberg in Duisberg (I think) who was being honoured at a special exhibition of her graphics - which included the sketches she had done in the 1930s of Nottingham miners. She was gracious enough to gift me with a set to give to the Scottish mining community and also a couple of books (with sketches) she wrote about her time with the Nottingham miners and about her life. And what a life! She was the brother of one of the Generals who took part in the failed July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler.

At a tram stop I come across another of these open stalls and pick up a collection of reproductions of Russian painters - not far away I pick up 5 great Fondazione Amadeus CDs of baroque music - for less than a euro each. No questions!!

Then a meeting with Blago, my young landlord, who is about to acquire a flat he thinks will interest me for my idea of a base here for the next 12 months (if the Serbia project does not come off) - and he is right. The ground floor of a delightful old house within minutes of Vitosha street and all my galleries. The timing fits - since it will be the end of the month before all the paperwork and slight adjustments are needed and that is the point at which I expect to hear the results of the Serbia project. I also look at a flat he will have for sale nearby which is in its original state and which they will restructure to give a living room of 50 sq metres. It would be a good investment.

Then off to see what the guy who sold me sketches (on an old magazine and scraps of paper) purporting to be from the pen of the great Ilia Beshkov has to offer. Beshkov (see example above) worked in the first half of the 20th Century. My bearded gallerist/artist Alexander Aleandriev (at Tsar Assen 38) has a tiny space in which there is room for a chair in which you sit while he pulls things (like rabbits out of a hat) that might interest you from plastic bags and piles of papers, magazines, drawings, aquarelles and oils (some his). This time he had prepared for me a superb large 1958 book with Beshkov sketches and cartoons on glorious paper and a 1965 autobiography full also of the sketches. I snapped them up - along with a 1907 catalogue of another cartoonist I had not heard of - Alexander Boshinov - and got a 1941 newspaper with a couple of Beshkov sketches thrown in as a bonus. "Super dumping prices" he says in his only English! We communicate in Russian - and he is indeed a veritable Russian figure with his beard, flow of words and bohemian work environment.



Then off for my appointment with another gallerist - who is also sitting amidst huge piles of unframed paintings some of which he had prepared for me. I sift through a couple of hundred - and emerge with seven paintings (including a Mateev and a dramatic painting by one Ivan Getsov (1910-1991) of a scene from the war of independence) for just over 1,000 euros in total.

I just have time to take them home and change - and it's off to a very pleasant dinner with Sylvie and Vlad, from whom I rented my flat in Sofia 3 years ago. A simple salad with a very quaffable Pomorie raki starts the meal in her beautifully spacious flat; followed by a superb delicacy she calls Tsarograd aubergine which has pieces of garlic, Bulgarian white cheese and herbs on a grilled opened-out aubergine base. Tsarograd is - as I learned from the early Mario Zhekov paintings - the old name for Istanbul. Vlad is heading out for a night on the tiles - so I get his garlic aubergine too! The piece-de-resistance is, however, the neck pork stuffed/marinated with three types of cheese!! I want a second helping but know when to call time! Thank you Sylvie! The point of this long diary entry is simply to say that I don't have such an active social life in other places. That's why Sofia scores.

Friday, May 6, 2011

Bulgarian gentility



I have never seen such a poor state of pavements as here in Sofia. I wonder what the statistics of broken ankles are here. Unfortunately the internet offers no real treatment of Bulgaria - there was a rather inconsequential piece recently on an Economist blog about [the corrupt state of the media here](#) but, as one of the discussants rightly said, they have been set a very good example by the anglo-saxon world!

I have always seen Sofia as have an old-fashioned gentility - mainly from the tiny shop and gallery units you find in its centre with both young and old eking out a fragile existence but at least one whose rhythm they control. Since hearing the buskers in the nearby park playing early 1960s jazz and rock, I realise that Sofia, in many ways, could market itself as the retro-capital of Europe. You still see Trabis (although generally vegetating on the sidewalks); and, at least round my area, the old folk are always out in strength and not marginalised as in so many other capitals. Of course, this is a stark reflection of the

poverty of the economy - indeed I just don't know how the economy here manages even to tick over. Romania has at least [one good news outlet in English](#) which I came across recently

Today I came across this [very evocative clip of poet John Betjeman](#) celebrating Philip Larkin's poetry.

Apparently today is both St George's Day AND the Day of the Bulgarian Army. So I'm using one of Ilia Petrov's pictures.

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Salute to the local municipal galleries

Thursday I spent on a very pleasant drive from Velingrad in the Rhodope mountains to Bucharest (500 kms) - first through the gorge I spoke about; then east across the Thracian plain with a spectacular glowering sky; a hop past Stara Zagora over another mountain; and pulled in at Kazanluk on the basis of what I had read about its Art Gallery. And I was not disappointed. I was warmly received by Daniela who introduced me to their collection which included the Stanio Stamatov featured above - he was one of many local painters. Indeed the small town was so prolific with artists that it used to be called "the town of a hundred painters". The collection is therefore a rich one - of both paintings and sculptures - and, amongst those whose acquaintance I made were Vasil Barakov (1902-1991); a sculptor Hristo Peshev (1923-2000); and Spas Zavgrov (1908-1991) born in a nearby village whose landscapes and portrait sketches were in a temporary exhibition funded by his family. Hristo Genev, the Director, welcomed me into his den and presented me with a couple of discs (one of his own material). He sculpts the most fascinating pieces from wood - one of which I displayed a couple of posts back. This is a gallery worth a detour to see - and many revisits!

I don't often look at yahoo stories - but this is a useful bit of [pleading for the simpler life we should be leading](#).

There are definite advantages in attending workshops which are in languages one doesn't understand! It forces you to use other senses to understand what is going on - to look at body language, for example. And it also gives me the time to reflect - eg I suddenly remembered the paper I had written in 2008 about Training assessment Tools which have different examples which could be used at the different stages of the training cycle. I duly had it printed it out and gave it to the Council of Ministers rep who was also attending the Vilengrad session (since they had insisted on a simplistic evaluation form being used). I will add this shortly to my website. And I was also able to read more closely the paper on [Training and Beyond; seeking better practices for capacity development](#) by Jenny Pearson which I referred to recently - which sets out very well [the critique of training I was myself struggling toward in my own 2008 paper](#).

Finally three good articles on the Chinese mood. The first about a rare [critical article on Mao](#) by an 82 year old Chinese economist. Then a good piece on [the competition for the new leadership positions](#).

The last is particularly interesting - since it gives [an insight into how systematic is the Chinese way of researching issues](#).

Sunday, July 10, 2011

[Vrachanski Balkans](#)

Up and away early to avoid the midday heat which once (actually three times) disabled the car a few years back in this part of the world at this time of the year as were driving back from the lovely Thassos island. Just outside Drama in Greece - as were beginning the ascent for the new border crossing there - the car engine just stopped. We were kindly treated (with an overnight stay needed for a petrol filter to be replaced) before the same happened at Plovdiv - after much meandering through gorges and round the densely wooded edges of the Rhodopes (with many minarets in the villages).



After a mechanic asked for 300 euros with no guarantees, we discovered the car was working again and decided to proceed - over the Balkans. A Romanian lorry driver confirmed that it was the heat - it had happened to him. Just as we reached the top of the mountain ridge, the car stopped again - but, by then, I knew the trick - just to wait ten minutes or so.

Anyway I needn't have worried today - since, apart from my climb over the Petrohan Pass starting before 09.00, the road is heavily wooded and therefore protected from the heat. But the surface is bad (particularly on the descent) and the road twisty - so a 100 kilometres journey from Sofia to Varshets actually took 3 hours (including a trip to Pennywise in the nearby village of Berkovitsa for a bottle of Mezzek Sauvignon/Pinot Gris). I'm in the heart of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park here - with towering mountain ranges on 2 sides. The [hotel is very nicely situated](#) - with solar panels covering the entire roof (very rare!). I was able to check in (to a large room), get organised and have a swim all before midday.

After my last post, I got thinking about Path dependency - and discovered that the phrase originated in economic not sociological studies as I had imagined. And, of course, it takes us deep into fundamental issues which thinkers have argued about for millennia - such as free-will! [The opening pages of this paper are quite enlightening about this](#) - but thereafter the paper gets typically turgid.

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

[out of this world](#)



I'm now in Belogradchik and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the first rock formations - some 20 kilometres before I hit the town. They extend over a 600-700 sq km area. The area is very poor - I detoured to the old carpet village of Chiprovitsa in an amazing bowl of mountains. A sleepy and disconsolate place - with many Trabans in the area. I had expected to see carpets displayed in the street - but all was desolate with only a small shop displaying very expensive stuff - 5 times

what I had paid for an old carpet!

There is a [very nice write-up of the Belogradchik rocks and town here](#).

Friday, August 5, 2011

Sofia's charms - again

Another very pleasant lazy (yester)day enjoying the incredible variety which Sofia has to offer anyone who appreciates serendipity - and who has some aesthetic inclinations. A slow walk up Ignatiev st in the morning to the City Gallery - which, in addition to the special "Other Eye" selection of paintings from its vaults by art critics, has at the moment [a marvellous exhibition of paintings of monasteries in the Balkans](#). Then a meander in the park where the jazz musicians were, as usual, active - giving everyone great pleasure. Then across to the great Tabak cafe at the back of the National Gallery - where they were loading various fascinating sculptures (hope it wasn't a heist!).

There was a small political meeting going on nearby - of older people.

And, at the open market in front of Alexander Nevski Cathedral, I picked up a large Chiproviste carpet for only 100 euros -



and also an amusing small "Troitsa" painting on wood by a young Dmitrov (Ivalio?) - the trinity were a corrupt looking mayor, teacher and priest all imbibing.

On the more serious side, this article well describes [how the financial crisis is impacting on ordinary people who bear absolutely no responsibility for it](#).

I hadn't realised that the German social market was based on [the theory of ordo-liberalism](#)

Wednesday, September 28, 2011

visual pleasures



It's good to be back in Sofia - with its vegetables (leeks and tomatoes); galleries; pleasant cycling and pace of life.

The Sofia City Gallery continues to celebrate its greats - with a special exhibition of one of Bulgaria's most revered painters - Nikola Petrov (1881-1916). I can understand why his influence (despite his youth) was so great - his landscapes are delicate; his portrait sketches deft; and his nudes were clearly the inspiration for Nikola Boiadjev. A very nice little book accompanies the exhibition - at only 5 euros.

I hadn't realised that Petrov was from one of the Danube towns - in the north-east, Vidin - which I haven't been able to get to so far but will certainly visit once the Romanian engineers eventually finish their half of the new bridge (another year off I suspect). The town does have [an art gallery](#). For me, Nikola Taney is the greatest and is also from a Danube village - Svishtov - the signs for whose car ferry I saw as I left the Russe District

I mentioned recently an interview with Ralf Dahrendorf on an excellent history series available on the internet. I don't use such facilities as much as I should - here's [another challenging snippet](#)

Monday, October 3, 2011

Rhodope charms

The Bulgarian roads are always a pleasure to drive - with the exception of some of the sinuous small roads which weave their way through the wooded hills which take up one third of the landmass of the country. I had a pleasant 4 hour drive yesterday afternoon - the first stretch along the superb and scenic open highway from Sofia to Plovdiv. Mountain ranges and valleys; then the lovely sight of the 2 pimple hills which stick out from the plain and mark ancient Phillipopolis; loop round the city and then under the stunning Assenovgrad fortress on another of these impossible rock-carved roads which characterise southern Bulgaria.



As always a strong river also blasted its way through gorges and across the stones nearby. My exhaust suddenly developed a hole and I disturbed the sabbath as I spun through the tired but handsome old villages round the fashionable skiing resorts to reach Smolyan at 16.30. I was keen to visit their municipal art gallery again - last visited 2 years ago to my very great pleasure. Amongst other local artists, I was introduced to the work of Anastas Staikov by a Slovak woman who guided us around and introduced us to the Director. What struck me was what they were achieving against the odds - they had insufficient money to maintain their stock properly - let alone advertise it. I had assumed that the gallery would be closed Monday. It was very easy to find - as always it was the Regional history Museum which was signposted and I had a vague recollection that the art gallery was next door. And so it was. But Sunday is, unusually, closing day for it (although the history museum was open). The curator there took me next door where the Gallery Director was working and confirmed that it would be open tomorrow.

I have to confess at this stage that I have been accompanied on the travels since early August by a stray kitten whose cries were heard just as we were about to leave Sofia in the first week of August. Impossible to resist his charms, he travelled with great serenity and aplomb first the 375 kilometres to Bucharest - and, the following day, the 3 hour journey to my lair in the Carpathian mountains. The mountain house was his heaven - 3 mice caught, for example. Since then, he has done another 1,250 kilometres - and could now reasonably be considered a nomad veritable. I smuggled him into the Smolyan hotel in my rucksack - and, having slept for most of the 4 hours, he is now once more asleep at the back of the laptop. Hopefully he will not give the game away in the next 3 hotel overnights!

The painting is a Zdrawko Alexandrov from the Smolyan gallery

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

Rhodope charm again

I was nicely received (as always) in the Smolyan Gallery on Monday - which has a very large space (3 floors) and a great collection but almost no money for maintenance.

My colleague, Belin (who was leading the workshop) is an architect by training; now an academic; and was, in the late 1990s, a Deputy Minister for Regional development. He explained for me the ambitious agenda of the socialist government in the 1970s when they merged 3 villages there (as they did elsewhere) and created urban systems which are now tottering. He also suggested a possible reason for the very different fates of villages in post-socialist Bulgaria and Romania. He suggests that land ownership was more completely collectivised in Bulgaria than in Romania - and that there was therefore no base left in Bulgarian villages post-1989 for the sort of self-sufficiency which still survives for example in my village amongst the old.



townscape of Turkish town. I was able, with some difficulty, to locate the art gallery - rather small and pathetic despite some great paintings - including the great Atanas Mihov (above) and this delightful Stefan Ivanov.



He suggests that land ownership was more completely collectivised in Bulgaria than in Romania - and that there was therefore no base left in Bulgarian villages post-1989 for the sort of self-sufficiency which still survives for example in my village amongst the old.

A marvellous journey on Tuesday through and over the mountains to Kardjali - quite amazing to see the isolated homesteads clinging so high up to the mountainsides! And all the minarets - most new. Kardjali has all the bustle and

Friday, October 14, 2011

Grim times for forgotten people

The house in the past week has been busy with guests - so not much chance to blog but lots of good conversation....wine and rakia. All of which needed in the colder and damp weather now being experienced here. So yesterday saw a trip to Teteven, nestling in the heart of the Balkan mountain range with the crucial aim of picking up local rakia from an old friend of Sylvie - my ex-landlady. After a speedy 80 kilometres on what must be the most scenic



highway in the Balkans, a 3rd class road took us 18 kilometres through a lovely plain marked by signs of decline - but the industrial dereliction of Teteven still shocked us. The town straddles along a river and must have about a dozen derelict plants - of which the picture is typical. The only sign of economic activity is an Italian furniture factory. And a sad story of hopelessness emerged over the superb lunch which awaited us. Elections are in a few weeks - but the political class is seen as irrelevant and venal. I got the impression of a return to Hobbesian conditions - with youngsters having neither jobs nor hope; old people expected to live on a pension of 100 euros a month; and the European Union's agricultural policy having shafted much of the rural self-sufficiency which produced such superb food in the past.

Thursday, October 27, 2011

Downside of Sofia Charms?

I've talked several times on the blog about the charm of central Sofia - with its parks and buskers with their retro music; narrow streets, small shops and atmosphere, the owners on the doorstep with a coffee and cigarette talking with friends. Of course the downside of such charm is that those who run the tiny vegetable, dressmakers, tricotage (thread) shops and various types of galleries barely make a living. How many of them are rented, I wonder, and therefore vulnerable to landlord rental hikes and commercial redevelopment? And I wonder how many of those who engage in this sort of soulless redevelopment realise what they are destroying. Is there nothing which can counter this Mammon? Do the city authorities realise what an asset they have? If so, are they doing anything about it? The lady mayor is certainly a huge improvement on her predecessor who, I was told yesterday, used to charge significant sums for those who wanted an audience with him to discuss their problems.



In the Yavorov District on Tuesday - a leafy and lively area near the University and just across from the great park which extends from the Eagle bridge and the football stadium for more than a

kilometre east along the Express way which starts the run to the Thracian Valley, Plovdiv and Burgas. Looked at an elegant old flat which had housed the middle managers of the railways in the 30s in an area otherwise known as a residential one for the military at the beginning of the last century. And ventured into a small basement antique shop which was a real alladin's cave of old Bulgarian and Russian stuff. The prize haul was a set of the small, shaped bottles in which rakia used to be drunk.

They seem to be 1950s or early 1960s - with wry humour stamped on to the glass. I haven't discussed rakia yet in the blog (apart from the blog about the recent visit to Teteven). First time I tasted rakia in 2002, when I sped through the country on the way to the Turkish Aegean, I found it inspid. But I have now had a chance to taste various brands - and compare it with various Romanian palinka - and have become an afficiando. Here is a write up of one brand which won a few years back a silver medal in the International Review of Spirits Award -

Golden salmon colour. Vanilla and toasted nut aromas. nice oily texture. Dryish, vanilla bean oily nut flavors. Finishes with a lightly sweet powdered sugar and pepper fade. A nice texture and finish but could use more on the mid-palate

Finally - a [great blogposts about traditional sheep farming](#) by someone who spent a couple of months with the shepherds and cheese makers in the Carpathians.

Wednesday, November 23, 2011

[Living without the luxuries](#)

Monday early saw me at the Military hospital again - this time to a floor so munificent it must have been designed for the Generals and Admirals! High uric acid was confirmed and I was referred to a specialist colleague who has put me on a diet for a few weeks which excludes alcohol and meat. What a torture to be in Bulgaria and denied access to its superb wines and rakias! Particularly after rediscovering the shop which supplies Karlovo wines straight from the barrel! And ironic that [the post from a year ago reproduced the text from a gravestone which celebrated someone's skills in producing drink](#)

Reminds me of the refrain in my favourite Romanian poem - "[cut out the wine!](#)".

The post from the 21st is also worth looking at again - it traced the writing over the past 50 years which has tried (unsuccessfully it seems) to [persuade us to live a simpler and more social life](#)



The New Yorker has a good piece of background reporting on [one of the key figures behind the Occupy Wall St movement](#).

And a UK Think Tank has issued a report on [some of the elements of the "good society"](#) which has become an important theme in one strand of social democratic re-thinking in Europe.

It's nice to be able to report on one celebrity figure actually [helping to create a more sustainable form of housing](#).

Finally, it's the time of the year when Vihra of the Astry Gallery here delights us with her [30 by 30 annual exhibition](#)

The sketch is an Ilyia Beshkov - very appropriate!

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

[Sofia City Gallery scores again!](#)



The Sofia City Art Gallery has put together another excellent exhibition - this time to honour the memory of the Bulgarian Association of New Artists which was active from 1931 to after 1944.

Founded in Sofia, its objective was to unite artists with similar aesthetic viewpoints who espoused new trends in art in keeping with movements in western Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Although its first members worked primarily in a realistic manner, around 1936—when membership had grown to 55—other Bulgarian artists who had studied and worked in Paris, Munich and Vienna joined its ranks.

Artists such as Alexandar Zhendov, BENCHO OBRESHKOV, Boris Eliseev, Vera Nedkova, David Perets, Eliezer Alshekh, IVAN NENOV, Kiril Petrov and KIRIL TSONEV contributed more modernist approaches, rejecting academic art, folkloric elements and especially the ideas of Social Realism put into practice by the founders of the Society. An internet review said its members created works with a "sophisticated approach to style, a purity of form and a stable internal structure".

But this sort of jargon doesn't tell me anything - and I have to say that, much as I appreciate this insight into the historical developments of Bulgarian painting and the imaginative way the City Gallery has dealt with it (with blow-ups of the agonised press receptions of the time adorning the gallery's pillars), this is not a genre which particularly appeals to me.

But I was deeply impressed with the graphics of Vesselin Staikov and the work of Ivan Penkov and Bronka Gyurova. After 1944 the New Artists' Society was absorbed by the Union of Bulgarian Artists. Many of those who had been members of the Society were declared 'bourgeois artists' by the Communist regime and were no longer able to take part in exhibitions; several, including Alshekh, Elisev and Perets, emigrated.

The frequency of these special exhibitions at the City Gallery (which always borrow works from the country's regional galleries) contrasts so favourably with the lack of imagination shown by the National Gallery just across the road which never changes its permanent exhibition and rarely puts on worthwhile specials (I do remember a great tanev exhibition they mounted a year or so ago. The

National Gallery charges about 5 euros - and the City Gallery is free. Therein lies a lessons about the better service generally offered by local government!

The graphic is one of Vesselin Staikov's at the exhibition. In addition to engravings with themes from nature, old towns and mountain villages, Staikov produced a cycle of engravings on the modern city: Sofia with its modern architecture, the clearing of rubble after the air-raids and the construction of new houses and buildings. The artist is also fond of doing ancient, strangely shaped trees. Labour themes occupy an important place in Staikov's work. He shows love and understanding for the worker, the peasant. Some engravings reflect the romanticism of Bulgarian scenery and architecture, others - the primitive force and ruggedness of the village landscape. .

Saturday, December 24, 2011

[the charm, yet again, of Sofia!](#)

After 4 years of familiarity with Sofia (almost 3 years in residence) it is typical that I stumbled yesterday on a well-established (and prestigious) gallery focussing on Bulgaria's old masters - hidden away in a charming and old part of Sofia between Prague Bvd and Bvds Makedonia/Totleben. It's [the Tzenotsi Gallery](#) and has the richest collection (in more senses than one) of all the galleries I have visited here.

The picture above is a Russi Genchev which the gallery would not deign to keep. This Boris Denev which adorns its spacious display walls is a more appropriate exemple of its exhibits.



And, like, the current exhibition at the City Gallery, there were so many painters of whom I hadn't heard. Some of the paintings seem to have been there for several years (eg some Vladimir Dmitrov's at 20,000 euros in the 2009 Antiques Price Guide) - which makes one wonder about their business model. Clearly they cater for bigger spenders than me! Probably an institutional market ie the banks! Talking of which, one of the nice features of many hotels here in Bulgaria is their display of (in many cases local) paintings.

In the same street as the Gallery (Buzludja) we also found an enticing little Weinstube ([Vestibule Wine Ambassador](#)) which turns out also to be a producer and seller of "bourgeois" furniture. Definitely worth a visit - both in winter for its cosy, traditional interior and in the summer for its garden area at the back. Also in the same street a patisserie with a great range of its own products - including a large apple and walnut cake round for 5 euros!

And we also had an interesting encounter in Tsar Samuel with the sinister Masons. One of the many tiny shops in the area between Hristov Botev and Vitosha with the products of imaginatively-crafted dresses, shawls etc enticed us in and to the purchase of an embroidered cardigan. We were so pleased we readily accepted several small calendar cards which marketed its 50-or so year-old artisan - only to discover when I accessed the website that [it had very strong masonic connections](#). I was so horrified I contemplated returning the cardigan - since, in Scotland, the Masons are a highly divisive force - in the 1970s with a strong and corrupt presence in the police forces. And I remember my (highly tolerant) father - a Scottish Presbyterean Minister - railing against their influence amongst his "Elders". But, in this part of the world where there was so much repression, [perhaps they played a different role?](#) They were certainly outlawed by the fascist forces here in the early 1940s and its members persecuted under the communists. Sadly the intrinsic secrecy of the organisation makes that [difficult to check out properly](#). Their apologists are full of good-sounding rhetoric about freedom and democracy but I cannot take seriously anyone who associates with their silly tribal initiation rituals with trousers at half-mast and quasi-religious artefacts.

Monday, December 26, 2011

[Fossils and patting sticks](#)



I spent two Xmas'es working in Baku, Azerbaijan - and very much appreciated the absence of the shopping fever and pressures which characterise these days in the West. Even His Holiness the Pope is apparently lamenting in his Christmas homily that Christmas has become an increasingly commercial celebration.

But Sofia must be one of the best places to be to avoid the

crassness of Xmas. True, the walking St (Vitosha) has overhead decorations - but they are modest and hardly noticed. Otherwise (if you avoid the malls which have opened only in the past few years) things are almost normal.

And some imagination is used to offer special attractions eg a large fossil market was open last week in the Museum of Natural History which offered marvellous shapes, sizes and textures at very cheap prices - eg this very aesthetic sea hedgehog fossil which doubles as a paper weight.

Saturday we wanted to buy a "soorovachka" - a stick decorated with embroidery, dried fruit, coins etc which kids in this part of the world use for patting family, friends and visitors (in Romania its' called "sorkova") whilst saying a wish



for health, wealth and happiness to the one patted.

Bulgarians and Romanians give the child money at the end of the patting which they believe is their way of buying success for the coming year. The women's market - the collection of open air stalls between Bvds Hristo Botev and Elizabeth - was the place to find it. Most of the products are local fruit and vegetables - with the spice stalls being my favourites. Such an incredible variety of spices and medicinal teas!

I realise that I haven't posted any video links of Bulgaria yet on the site - [here's a good one to start with](#).

Saturday, January 14, 2012

[user-friendly cities - a missing argument](#)

A visit last week to the office which manages the project I lead here led to another interesting conversation with one of the many pleasant young Bulgarians one finds here in consultancies, academia and foundations. As always, there was a surprised reaction to my characterisation of Sofia as one of Europe's best capital cities. I gushed - as I usually do - [about the charm of central Sofia](#) -



with only a couple of high-rise buildings, its small shops, narrow streets, trams and atmosphere, the owners on the doorstep with a coffee and cigarette talking with friends; with its parks and buskers with their retro music.

Of course the downside of such charm is that those (young and old) who run the tiny vegetable, dressmakers, tricotage (thread); hairdresser shops and various types of galleries barely make a living. How many of them are rented, I wonder, and therefore vulnerable to landlord rental hikes and commercial redevelopment?

And I wonder how many of those who engage in this sort of soulless redevelopment realise what they are destroying - the sheer pleasure of wandering in friendly and attractive neighbourhoods. Is there nothing which can counter this Mammon? Do the city authorities realise what an asset they have? If so, are they doing anything about it? The lady mayor is certainly a huge improvement on her predecessor who, I

was told yesterday, used to charge significant sums for those who wanted an audience with him to discuss their problems.

Mayor Jordanka has introduced traffic-free days; cleared many cars from the pavements and created bike lanes (where Denmark, Germany and Netherlands have blazed a trail). Here she is with a new Deputy Mayor who was, until October 2011, Deputy Minister of Culture

But have her advisers looked to the examples from Italian cities - whose city fathers well understood the treasures for which they had responsibility - and introduced regulations, decades ago, which made it very difficult to change the commercial use of centrally-located shops. Banks

and mobile phone shops are an abomination - and should be located in side-streets (like whore-houses).

We need to understand the reasons which have produced such soulless, homogeneous monstrosities in so many European cities. The explanation is generally simple - a combination of political pygmies and professional advisers seduced by commercial interests. Their fall-back argument is the loss of municipal revenue from freezing commercial useage which serves the needs of the average citizen - as against the fickle purchases of young, transient, gentrifying residents who resemble so much the destructive Genghis Khan hordes who swarmed through these areas centuries before.

So, those who respect this human-scale really do need to meet this argument. I've mentioned several times [the writings of Paul Kingsnorth](#) who is one of the few people to deal with this issue. Even he, however, has not dealt with this central question.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012

[Neglect of Bulgarian painting patrimony](#)



We reached Razgrad via a quiet country road from Targovishte with the sparkling snow fading as we hit the vineyards. Razgrad is a fairly isolated town of 40-50,000 people lying on the plain between Russe on the Danube and Varna on the Black Sea. Its town centre is clean and lively - with the huge mosque (which I have on one of my paintings) acting as the centre for the pedestrian area in which the attractive and modern-looking municipal gallery is located.

Typically however, it being 12.10, it was closed for the long lunch break and - despite the seductive poster advertising a special exhibition - we moved on for Russe on the basis that we could visit next week when a workshop is being held nearby.

I've wanted to visit the [Russe municipal gallery](#) for some time - the town, after all, has more than 200,000 people; has been an important port on the Danube for a long time; and has a proud tradition of culture - with quite a few well-known painters to its name eg Marko Monev. And the gallery was not difficult to find - the girls in the OBV petrol station at the central station roundabout knew it was just round the corner. However the gallery is in a scandalous state for such a city - with (a) no heating and (b) the paintings in one of the three rooms lying propped on the floor with no means of identification. Unlike all the other regional galleries I've visited in Bulgaria, the Russe one charges for entrance - OK only 50 pence - but that does raise expectations a little. No Monev paintings were on display but there were some superb works from Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistera, Atanas Mihov, Benchko Obreshkov and Nenko Balkanski - all, however, at risk from the disgraceful conditions. What was even more galling was that an expensive book was on offer - at 25 euros - celebrating 75 years of the gallery. It must have cost 5,000 euros to produce - money which would have been much better spent to keep the paintings in a safer condition.

I can understand the galleries of smaller municipalities being in poor conditions - but there is asolutely no excuse for this neglect for a city such as Russe. Places like Razgrad andKazanlak - with one fifth of the population - clearly do so much better! Pity the poor young warden who sat wrapped up and freezing in his cubicle as I happily snapped the choicer exhibits.

What sort of future does he have? He shrugged his shoulders when I asked about the Monev paintings - and smiled sadly when I asked if there was a feedback book available for me to make my comments! At the very least, the city authorities should relocate the paintings to a smaller place which is easier to heat! And it doesn't take much money to produce a CD of the gallery collection. Of course art galleries are a municipal responsibility and rightly so. And the Sofia and Kazanluk galleries show what can be done by committed local authorities and staff - with both organising special exhibitions and having a range of products (including CDs) for sale. But the protection of Bulgarian painting patrimony is surely a national issue.

Friday, March 2, 2012

[Vagabond in Bulgaria](#)

The snow had melted sufficiently by the weekend to allow me to drive down to the flat in Sofia - the snow was still lying in the Romanian fields but no longer in the Bulgarian ones. Midweek, however, the snow struck again! Earlier in the month, when snow melted in the south, the walls of a dam in the south of the country had crumbled and an entire village was inundated - with 10 deaths. The history and management of the dam give [a good insight into governance issues in this part of the world](#). Noone apparently understands what its purpose was and its ownership was split between three bodies - with obvious (and tragic) results.



The story appears in the current issue of [Bulgaria's monthly English magazine Vagabond](#) which is always a good read. The current issue gave me [useful data on the property market](#) -

Property prices in Bulgaria will continue to fall, experts say, but it is difficult to predict whether the downward trend will be gradual or whether the property market will crash like it did in 2009. In Sofia, the average price of residential property is 40 percent lower than in 2008, as buyers now typically pay 700-750 euros per square metre. The majority of properties are bought by first-time buyers, usually young families, who take out mortgages to buy small flats. Russians continue to be the chief purchasers of holiday properties.

Another article also threw some light on another issue which has been vexing me very recently - relating to interactions between foreigners like me and Bulgarians. An Italian friend of mine spent almost a decade here, building up a great network of contacts - which, ultimately, did nothing to further his prospects. He left the country with some bitter comments about outsiders never being accepted here. At the time I simply could not agree since I have quite a few people here I count as real friends. However, I have noticed recently the different assumptions about hospitality. I am very open - but find it difficult to get many friends to visit me in my flat. And it is rare to receive an invitation.

An article by a Professor of multi-cultural communication confirms the point that inviting foreigners to one's home is a very big deal here - and makes the point in relation to facial

expressions that "if you smile at people they will think you are either laughing at them or that there is something wrong with you"!! Little wonder that I was viewed as a madman initially by some of my local staff when I headed a project here in 2007/08!

The current issue also contains an article about the great network of small rural guesthouses here in Bulgaria where you can eat local produce; get friendly family hospitality and access to great leisure pursuits (including horse-riding).

A great Guide from [the Bulgarian Alternative Tourism Association](#) can be [downloaded here](#). And, if you are into serious mountain climbing, then this looks a great organisation to [contact for advisers and guides](#)



While I'm on the subject, here's also an outsider's view of [the top 15 places to visit in Bulgaria](#). And also a nice piece (in English if you scroll down) [about Balcic in the far North-East corner](#) which used to belong to Romania. I've been renewing my contact with some of the small galleries here in Sofia and saw a nice-looking and well-sized Zhekov for 1,500 euros - the same price a picture of his went for in the December Victoria Auction. The painting at the top of this post is a Zhekov - which hopefully explains why he is one of the top Bulgarian painters for me.

In a small antique shop very nearby which seems now to be stocking painters from the genre and period I like, a superb (anonymous) painting of Rila Monastery from the mid 20th century was to be had for 150 euros.

And the painting above is Vladimir Kavaldjiev from the 1960s was on sale at a 2010 auction for 750 euros but can now be had for 600.

Sunday, March 4, 2012

Liberation and Loss in Bulgaria

I knew something was special when I saw the Bulgarian flag stuck out of a neighbour's window yesterday morning; small national flags for sale in pedestrianised Vitosha Bvd; and a small crowd watching the changing of the guard at the Presidency.

Young people told us it was Liberty Day - from which I thought it was Independence Day - but that in fact is September 22 and marks the declaration of Bulgaria as a sovereign nation.

March 3 is in fact a more bitter-sweet date for the Bulgarians since it marks the day in 1878 when Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed [the San Stefano Treaty](#) which gave the country autonomous status within the Ottoman Empire after 500 years of Ottoman domination. It was also awarded a large landmass (indeed access to the Aegean Sea) but lost a significant part of this new territory later the same year at the Berlin Congress (the Macedonian and Greek parts in the left and bottom of the map). According to Wikipedia

The Treaty was in fact a preliminary one but, almost immediately, became the central point of Bulgarian foreign policy, lasting until 1944 and led to the disastrous Second Balkan War and Bulgaria's even more disastrous participation in World War I. The enlarged Bulgaria envisioned by the treaty alarmed neighboring states as well as France and Great Britain. As a result, it was never implemented, being superseded by the Treaty of Berlin following the Congress of the same name.

On the square round the corner from the President's Palace, we found about 30 buses parked - with signs from Bulgaria's main towns. A Russian and Yiddish German speaking Bulgarian photographer with whom I tried to elicit more info in Russian could cast no light on where the bus passengers were - or for what purpose.

As we approached the imposing Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, we could hear martial music. I thought this was part of the national celebrations but it quickly turned out to be part of the neo-fascist Ataka party's takeover of the celebrations. I'm not religious myself but I found highly offensive the scaffolding they had constructed over the entrance to the Cathedral and the military music which poured from it. Presumably the church authorities were in on this? The banner which topped the scaffolding demanded freedom from foreign control.

As I turned away in disgust (from the aggression and context rather than message), I was hit with even more loud and aggressive rock music being played by louts on an open-lorry which led an Ataka demonstration of about 4,000 just as it was turning into the square. [According to the news report](#)



the march had started from the National Palace of Culture all the way through downtown Sofia to the "Nevsky" square, with several stops, such as the buildings of the Finance and Economy Ministries. There, Ataka leader, Volen Siderov, demanded the resignation of their respective ministers for betraying national interests and working for colonizers and for the impoverishment of Bulgarians. Siderov delivered a 50-minute-long speech, asking for decent jobs for all Bulgarians, European wages (current rates are about 15% of the EU average), eliminating monopolies and transferring all business back to Bulgarian hands.

He accused European leaders of trying to cut Bulgaria to pieces, as all Great Forces have done, not caring about Bulgarian people and their well-being, and labeled the EU the "new Soviet Union." The nationalist leader further slammed Prime Minister, Boyko Borisov, and his cabinet of not doing anything to improve the situation for fellow countrymen and women. At the end of the speech, Siderov, appealed to all, who are banging him and want his post, to have the courage to look him in the eye and tell him what they want and let people be the judge. "Any action against Ataka only serves Turkish and Gipsy interests, and all enemies of Bulgaria," he said.

A lot of old people from all over over Bulgaria had come to take part in the march and register their disgust with how the world has treated them in the past 20 years. In that sense, it was not quite what you expect to see in a demonstration by an aggressive neo-fascist group.

It was a very subdued and sad group of people who shuffled past us.

After the march had passed, we tried to engage an elderly man in conversation, but he insisted very proudly that he spoke only Bulgarian.

Bulgarian labour costs per hour were 3 euros in 2010 compared with an EU average of 25 euros - but the 20% plus rate which has been registered in the past years has caused [a warning to be issued recently by the EC](#)

The Bulgarian Finance Ministry doesn't see it that way. It notes that lately the country's current account deficit has declined - from 23.1 percent of GDP in 2008 to 8.9 percent for 2009 to just 1.3 percent for 2010, tracking closely with the advance of the financial crisis. What's more, the ministry says, the current account for 2011 will show a surplus, amounting to 1.8 percent of GDP. While the Finance Ministry argued about numbers, some Bulgarian commentators went straight to outrage. "Some ... in Brussels forget that besides the relative numbers, there are also absolute ones," wrote Svetoslav Terziev in the Sega (Now) newspaper. "The average monthly salary in Bulgaria is 350 euros and Oli Rehn's is 22,122."

Very fair point! Cost of living is cheaper here but not one eighth cheaper - which it would need to be for those on lower incomes to survive. More like 60% of costs in any other European capital than the 12% required by labour costs!

I'm happy to accept the going rate for consultants here - which is half what I would get for work in Central Asia and at least a quarter of what I might normally expect in the UK (although I suspect the public sector redundancies there have driven the rate). My fee, however, is still ten times that of the average daily wage here!!

Ataka (and Bulgarian commentators) are quite right to target the EC bureaucrats whose behaviour, typically, is calculated to destroy the whole European edifice.

Monday, March 5, 2012

[picking up Voltaire's Coconuts](#)



A second-hand English bookshop here in Sofia which boasts 10,000 titles - this is [the Elephant Bookstore](#). Go down Rakovski St from the square in front of Alexander Nevski Cathedral, cross Dundukov Bv and its on your left - although somewhat disguised at the back of a tea Shop which you have to enter through a large iron gate.

The collection is in a tiny space - with the books piled to a high ceiling. I emerged with 5 or 8, depending on how you count them since one was a bumper collection of four

West of Scotland novels written variously between the 1930s to 1980s entitled *Growing up in the Westland* containing no less than 4 different books - Edwin Muir (*Poor Tom*) by one of Scotland's most respected writers of the 20th century and three less well-known writers - JF Hendry (*Fernie Brae*), Gordon M Williams (*From Scenes like these*) and Tom Gallacher (*The Apprentice*). Although the last was published in 1983 and is based on life and shipyard work in the 1950s in my home town (*Greenock*), I was not aware of the book or the writer. Many people say there was a renaissance of Scottish writing in the 1980s - but I would suggest that this is to underestimate what was being produced fairly consistently in the 20th century in this small country of 5 million people. I'll say something more shortly about this.

Another book was also an unknown [Voltaire's Coconuts - or anglomania in Europe](#) by Ian Buruma an under-rated writer who was born a Dutchman, writes now in English and has lived in Japan, UK and America. The book brings many European historical figures to life eg Voltaire, Goethe, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Marx - all from the perspective of their attitude to the structure of English life and government. It starts with Voltaire's famous query - "Why can't the laws that guarantee British liberties be adapted elsewhere?"

Having been imprisoned in the Bastille for publishing a satirical poem on religious persecution in France, Voltaire travelled to England to find his model of tolerance and liberty. As a universalist and a rationalist, the French philosopher assumed that these virtues could be transplanted elsewhere, and most especially to the France of the ancien Regime. Anticipating objections on the lines of "you might as well ask why coconuts, which bear fruit in India, do not ripen in Rome" he stated that it took time for those (legal) coconuts to ripen in England too. There is no reason, he said, why they shouldn't do well everywhere, even in Bosnia and Serbia. So let's start planting them now."

What Voltaire essentially admired in England was the theory of equality before the law and the separation of legislative and executive powers. England in the 18th and 19th centuries was seen by prominent French and German figures in many regards in the way we now view the United States of America - full of dynamism, workshop of money but with rather uncouth, disrespectful citizens and media.

A 1998 edition of JK Galbraith's 1958 [The Affluent Society](#) was the next book - this one with a foreward in which the author assessed what time had done to his analysis. One of the reviews I

unearthed was by writer and left-wing Labour MP John Strachey in the long-defunct [Encounter magazine](#). Here is [a highly viewable video of Galbraith reminiscing](#),

Books by Saul Bellow (The Adventures of Augie March) and Louis de Bernieres (Captain Corelli's Mandolin) rounded off my purchases - all for the total price of 17 euros! Such is the joy of serendipity in foreign bookshops - and this one in particular!

The cafe also has a great atmosphere and buzz - being Sunday, parents and kids were present, with lots of activities for the latter. My one complaint is that a lot of the books were disfigured - apparently deliberately - with the back page of the cover having been torn off. This is pure sacrilege - I have never come across this apparent policy.....

I have, on this blog, already posted links to [surveys of the literature from small countries in central europe](#) particularly Hungary which I offered in [a discussion about the subject on another blog](#)

The Irish are well-known as good story- tellers and writers- whether it is George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, WB Yeats, Louis McNeice or, more recently, William Trevor, John Banville, John McGahern or Sebastian Barry. As a Scot, I have an obvious bias in suggesting that the quality and quantity of the Scottish literary output of the past 80 years is on a par with the European best (Latin American and China are something else!!). For [an introduction see this assessment](#) and this [listing of the best 100 Scottish books](#)

Friday, March 9, 2012

[Sliven's excellent galleries](#)

Sliven, with 100,000 inhabitants, is half the size of neighbouring Stara Zagora; also has a dramatic location with mountains rising sheer from behind; but has a more run-down appearance. I associate the town with two things - the painter Dobre Dobrev (198-1973) and excellent white wine (Vini Sliven which has become very difficult to find now in Sofia; Windy Hills I have not yet tasted!)



And the town has done Dobrev proud - with some 50 of his paintings on permanent display in a superb National Revival house. Here I found the painting which had so attracted me in the special exhibition mounted 2 years ago by the Sofia City Gallery - with the fingers of the man at the cafe so clearly drawn!

I was taken to the Gallery by Evelin who had been kind enough to show me round the Sirak Stitnik Gallery which is the town's main gallery - with a collection just as good as that I saw the previous day in the neighbouring town.

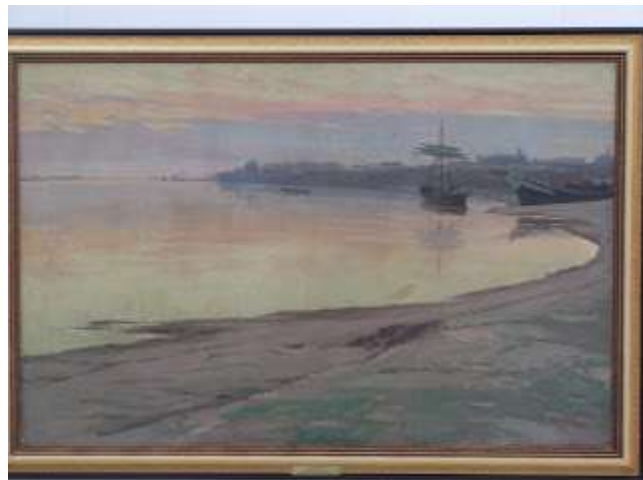
Not only the country's greats such as Tanev,

Abadjiev and Boris Denev but a special exhibition of the graphics of a new painter for me - Kozuharev, Nikola (1892-1971).

He's famous apparently for his mythological and historical paintings but was also a war artist - covering the Balkan War and First World Wars - and some of these sketches were on display. This painting is of the capture of Bulgaria's greatest freedom-fighter - Vassil Levski. Unfortunately, there was no heating in the place - like the Russe and Targovishte galleries

A good display in Stara Zagora

Stara Zagora was reached in exactly 3 hours - along an excellent motorway which, however, peters out at that point. It has a superb location with the Balkan mountains as a majestic backcloth. It was completely destroyed by the Turks in 1877 for welcoming the Russian army of General Gurko and was subsequently rebuilt on a strict grid-plan with leafy Boulevards. I therefore had no problems finding the Art gallery which is a most impressive one - well maintained and offering, for 1 euro, 3 separate exhibitions.



The permanent one displays some of the works of the many painters who have been born and worked there - eg Anton Mitov, Mario Zhekov and Atanas Mihov (1879-1974) who, with Zhekov and Dobre Dobrev, is now becoming one of my real favourites. Paintings by Nikola Tanev, Ivan Penkov (here) and Moutafov were also on display.



The Gallery also offered a collection of women's portraits and, finally, a display of woodcuts and graphics in a temperature controlled room.

A superb book *The Artists of Stara Zagora* was also available - produced by the Gallery Director Marin Dobrev who was kind enough to sign it for me. And I was allowed to snap many of the paintings - without flash, of course. The exhibits were so enthralling I spent almost two hours in total there - with a return visit after the lunchbreak.

Many new names - eg Vasil Marinov and a great portraitist Elizabeth Konsulova-Vazova (1881-1965)

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

A painting privilege in Shumen

Another workshop at Targovishte - and the morning swim and exercise we have now started in Sofia (just round the corner in at Rodina Hotel) left no time to pop in to see the Veliko Tarnovo Gallery (about which I haven't heard anything in any case). But I had learned that Shumen has [an interesting gallery from this link I had accidentally come across](#).

The town of Shumen (80 kms from Varna and the Black Sea) is a bit unprepossessing as you drive in - with decaying 1950s residential blocks. But its centre is a pleasant surprise, with one the largest pedestrian areas I have ever seen - with trees, a theatre, statues and a mountain range behind. Its upper side is graced with a series of old, large official buildings - of which a mock Italian palace (the police station) is perhaps the most interesting.

The Elena Karamihaylova Gallery was known only by two elderly ladies and was initially a disappointment - since the second floor containing the permanent collection was closed for reconstruction. But conversations with 3 (of the 7) staff managed to convey our love of Bulgarian painting and the Director graciously presented us with an attractive pack containing 20 postcards of the paintings, a CD and a small booklet giving the history of the collection and short notes on the artists.

When, however, I mentioned the name Alexander Moutafov (who was apparently born in Shumen), it was literally the key to open an Aladdin's Cave.



Valentina Velikova, the paintings expert, took us to the archives where we saw the collection (of 1,300 items) stored and filed. And she was kind enough to find and pull out for our inspection various portraits by Elena Karamihaylova and paintings by Nikola Tanev, Alexander Moutafov and Stanio Stamatov. Marvellous to have a chance to handle such work. And great that a small gallery should have developed such a nice pack. They are rare amongst Regional galleries in having a CD - only Kazanlak (so far on my travels) has offered such a product. It is so simple, cheap to create - and so necessary given the large numbers of paintings which are doomed to spend their life in basement archives!

During the journey, I had said that I did not think that Brits had made their home in this part of the country - but, on the way back to the hotel, we popped into a Lidl supermarket and got into conversation with a British couple who have been living in a village outside Shumen for the past 5 years. They told us that quite a few Brits were in the area.

Friday, March 16, 2012

setting priorities in municipal services

Razgrad's Ivan Petrov Gallery proved worth the wait. Housed in a superb, modernised and specially-designed building (with EC funding) in the heart of the town right next to the well-kept mosque, it has an enthusiastic Director, Todor Todorov, who personally showed us round the collection on display. This included about 6 Danail Dechevs, a Tanev, a Boris Denev, several Vladimir Dimitrovs and two painters so far unknown to me - Maxim Tsankov (1877-1965) and Kosta Petrov (1894-1973). Unfortunately Vodafone here in Romania does not give me the capacity to upload a photo from my camera - that will have to await my return to Bulgaria (on Sunday we go to a workshop at Balcik on the Black Sea for a couple of days).

The art gallery there is also well worth a visit - as befits an area which has attracted so many painters.) In the meantime I post another example of Dechev's work which has smaller capacity.



Razgrad's permanent exhibition also includes an excellent graphics collection.

The gallery's catalogue is the best I have seen - with coloured reproductions and English as well as Bulgarian notes on the paintings and painters. It also has a website - although still, clearly, in the process of construction. Razgrad's gallery, therefore, must go to the top of my unofficial list of best housed, managed and documented regional galleries in Bulgaria - with Stara Zagora a close second. Russe is the worst. Of course, these are not necessarily the best criteria - for example the poorly-housed Targovishte Gallery was abuzz with a group of school-kids - and the unheated Skitnik gallery in Sliven sponsors an annual Plein Air summer school. Such local access and use should clearly be the core of the mission of any art gallery.

I find these differences an interesting example of the effects and importance of local government - although I've made the point here before that the proper maintenance of older paintings which are part of a country's national patrimony has national significance. The lack of heating which threatens so many paintings in Bulgaria's regional art galleries is a disgrace - but perhaps it is too easy to put this down to lack of municipal funding. I found it curious that one of the galleries I visited had 7 staff. Of course I never like to recommend job-shedding but, in this case, perhaps lack of heating simply shows a poor sense of budgetary priorities!

The Razgrad Gallery is the only one I have seen which has used Regional Funds to make such a major refurbishment - which shows both official initiative and political support. I still have to visit Balcik, Burgas, Dobrich, Veliko Tarnovo and Pleven Galleries - and pay homage at Svishtosh to Nikola Tanev. I doubt, however, whether I will find a better gallery!

Monday, March 19, 2012

Artists' Paradise

Bulgaria's North-East (like most of its other extremities) is pretty poor. It has known better days. The Black Sea was like a mill pond yesterday - and the blue skies and sun had Balchik's small promenade full. The small town which clings to the white sandstone cliffs is popular with both Bulgarians and Romanians - it is only 30 kilometres or so from the border and did indeed belong to Romania for almost 30 years. After the Second Balkan War, in 1913, the town, styled Balçik, became part of the Kingdom of Romania and was much loved by its Queen Mary. It was regained by



Bulgaria during World War I (1916-1919), but Romania restored its authority when hostilities in the region ceased. Quite a lot of the Romanian bourgeoisie built villas - many of which have collapsed due to the soil subsidence which is a problem in the area.

But in 1940, just before the outbreak of World War II in the region, Balchik was ceded by Romania to Bulgaria. When we were last here - 10 years ago (on the way back from a trip to Turkey) - our landlady lowered her voice to speak Romanian.

The town's art gallery has apparently paintings from that period by Romanian artists - who were charmed by the strong muslim air the town had in those days. [The gallery's website](#) understandably uses the language of "occupation" when it talks about "the group of eleven Romanian artists who have painted Balchik during the occupation of Dobroudzha". The group includes two favourites of mine - Alexandru Satmari and Samuel Mutzner. Many Bulgarian artists have taken the air here - not least Mario Zhekov (I don't think the villa shown in this painting of his survives) - and the area also boasts famous cliffs further north. Sadly, however, the permanent collection was closed - due to reconstruction (as with Shumen, the charming young woman could offer no firm date for its re-opening). But a few of the Romanian paintings were on display - as well as a temporary exhibition of paintings by an 84 year old Nedelcho Nanov - mostly miniatures of the area painted variously in the 1960s and 2000s.

He is now based in Sofia - and this "Interior" was, for me, particularly intriguing.

A trip north to Kavarna - which was also a painter's haunt - was, however, disappointing. The town has been built back from the sea - and a curious remote stretch of road leads to the sea and to an eerie ghost town of half-finished modern blocks of tourist flats. The one positive feature of the town was its gleaming new sports facilities.....

A forest of wind turbines as we approached the town suggested a progressive mayor - but turned out to be linked to horrific new golf



courses and the usual alien complexes of the rich associated with them. There was even a special Italian/Bulgarian furniture chain standing at the side of the road out of Balchik catering for these aliens. "Green" electricity is apparently more expensive than the local!

Tomorrow we hope to see the [Dobrich Art Gallery](#) collection the way back to Sofia (they assure me that it is possible to see the permanent exhibits!). That gallery offers a first for Bulgarian regional galleries – [a blog!](#)

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

[An interesting conversation in Dobrich](#)



Dobrich is some 30 kilometres inland from Balchik and has the look and feel of a town double its official size of 93,000 citizens. Its central square is one of the largest I have ever seen – and is adorned by various large buildings, one of which (previously the Court of Justice built under the "occupation") now houses the extensive art collection – which you can find listed on the [town's excellent \(English\) website](#) (at the end of its list of cultural centres)

While we were admiring the small special exhibition of Vladimir Dmitrov- he Master's work, we were approached by the Gallery's Director,

Evelina Handzhieva who speaks excellent French and, very graciously, gave us a personal tour of her domain. It started with a group of schoolkids who were receiving some interactive training in the process of paper-making – the gallery, uniquely, has a collection of paperworks produced by the participants of a recent international event held here.

Separate sections are devoted to the gallery's collection of sculptures and prints – and to local artists as well as old masters – such as this rare work of Ivan Mrkvichka (1856-1938),

one of two Czechs (the other is Jaroslav Vesin) who are credited with setting Bulgarian painting on its modern path.

The breadth of the collection is one of the widest I have seen (with a nice mix of older and contemporary). The exhibition space is so extensive that the tour took more than an hour – with Daniela being loaned a coat to protect her against the cold (no heating again).

I was very taken with this contemporary work by Plaven Valchev (born 1951).



I have been nicely received in all of the Regional galleries I have visited in Bulgaria – but this was the first time I was able to have a proper conversation about the problems of running galleries here



at this time. Over a cup of tea, Evelina (like all the Directors here I've met an artist herself) explained that it is the Ministry of Culture who set a formula which dictates the number of staff to which regional galleries are entitled. So much for local government autonomy!! And, in Dobrich's case, with such an huge palace, the staff of 12 (including 2 cleaners and 3 attendants) is simply insufficient. There is no surveillance system - so security is labour-intensive.

As was evident from the number of brochures, the Director is highly proactive in

seeking out opportunities for marketing and funding (A Swiss Foundation was mentioned) and the Gallery's CD lists the various international exhibitions (eg China and Slovakia) which have been mounted with the support of Embassies here. But it is an uphill struggle - a good venture of bussing tourists from the beaches nearby during the summer fizzled out.

It is not easy to produce a winning formula for such a problem. But one thing is clear for me - it requires local solutions and this means removing the dead hand of central control - and encouraging networking between galleries (national and international), hotels, businesses (eg the new owners of the rich agricultural land and the golf courses!!) and educational establishments. Don't get me wrong - national financial support needs to be maintained (otherwise the galleries could be at more risk)) but on the basis of more imagination.....

This is a detail of the Valchev painting

Thursday, March 22, 2012

[Fine example of 1980s art](#)

Hats off (again!) to [Vihra Pesheva of Astry Gallery here](#) who has mounted another wonderful celebration of an older Bulgarian artist. This time it is a extensive collection of the work of Vassil Valev from the 1980s. Valev was born in 1934 in a village near Burgas - and his oil and aquarelle work from this period focusses on that. He was Director for a time of Targovishte Art Gallery and is now still a Professor. His intro on the website says simply -

I was born in the village where I spent my childhood and teen years. Many of my stories relate to the village: Cow yards, neighbours gossiping, rural suburbs, rural toil. Even my landscapes from Sofia are the suburbs rather than the noisy city centre. The characters in my paintings are working people, often elderly, those suffering...



AsVihra puts it - "Bulgaria's period under the socialist regime still arouses complex emotions. The art from this period is, variously, denied, ignored or treated as a collector's genre rather than appreciated individually. But it is part of our cultural heritage and Vassil Valev's work offers a rare depth". Whether showing tobacco harvesters, Iraqi nomads or family groups, the works (often gouache) show a deep human sympathy.

Vihra does not have a lot of space in her small gallery - but this time her exhibition offers not only the oils on the wall but a collection of unmounted aquarelles in folders. The average price is about 500 levs. Some of them, for me, have the Ilyia Beshkov touch.

All this in addition to the display of oils and small sculptures in the entrance area from other living artists always makes her gallery a joy to visit.

26 March 2012

Cultural tourism in Bulgaria



A year ago I announced that I was trying to draft [a booklet on realist Bulgarian art](#) to encourage visitors to visit the great galleries here - and gave a link on my website to the concept as it then stood. Thanks to the recent regional tour and a kind offer of assistance from the Curator of the Dobrich Gallery, I have been working on the draft again - and have [just uploaded a new version to the website](#). This one gives a small amount of info on about 150 painters who have taken my fancy. And yesterday I found another [charming little private gallery \(Loran\)](#) exhibiting works from the mid century.

The caricaturists

The Bulgarian tradition of caricaturists is a very strong one - starting (I think) with Alexander Bozhinov a hundred years ago and including people such as Ilyia Beshkov, Marco Behar and Boris Angeloushev. One of them, indeed, Rayko Aleksiev so annoyed the communists that he was arrested on their

coming to power and died in prison under suspicious circumstances. A Gallery is named after him. One of my prize possessions is a copy of a 1954 magazine called New Bulgaria with each of its 18 pages covered with 3-4 amazing pencil caricatures almost certainly doodled by Bulgaria's most loved graphic artists - Ilyia Beshkov. I was happy to pay 250 euros for it - after all I got 50 sketches for about the same price as the going rate for one (admittedly larger) caricature of his! And in one of Sofia's many street stalls, I bought last week two 1962 issues of an art magazine Izkustvo - one of which had excellent Beshkov reproductions - to add to the rather worn 1941 issue I have of another cultural newspaper Shturschel (?) which has a Beshkov reproduction on its front page.

This got me surfing the net to try to find some information about these art journals of the early and mid part of the century. I drew a blank but did come across some interesting material on [the Bulgarian cultural heritage](#) - not least some grim experiences one young painter had [during the the Communist period](#). How artists coped during communist repression is a fascinating subject - some

(like Boris Denev and Nikolai Boiadjev refused to toe the official line on painting and almost stopped painting); many other moved into theatre design and cinema). Things had eased by the 1980s largely due to the influence of PM Zhivkov's daughter who was a great art afficiando! I unearthed an interesting paper on [how the communist heritage could be used as part of a cultural tourist strategy](#) (which missed this human dimension) and another paper (by the same Dobrich author) on [how Bulgaria might develop a strategy for cultural tourism](#). Also an interesting [example of how some of the treasures here are ignored](#) even by the locals.

The gouache above may look a little like a Beshkov - but is actually one of the V Vulev's I bought a few days ago in Vihra's Gallery

Sunday, April 22, 2012

[Balkan idyll in the sun?](#)

The latest issue of Vagabond has an interesting article on the fate of many working class Brits who were attracted a decade ago by British TV programmes to buy cheap property in the Bulgarian countryside. The piece is called [British homes across rural Bulgaria lie empty](#). [Where have all the people gone?](#) and makes the following interesting points -

The Britons who came at this time had never had the financial assets to dabble in UK property, nor any experience of speculation. Obsessed with land ownership and investment potential, the idea of a life in the sun without a mortgage was just too big a dream to pass up. By day, they would wrestle physically on village streets and by night, sedated by the tropical chirping of crickets, cheap alcohol and impossibly attractive waitresses, they would discuss their numerous purchases and renovation plans. It was basically so damn cheap and easy, the exchange rate was good and the Bulgarians more than willing to ship old baba off to a flat in town, vacating the decaying village home, previously considered worthless. Everything was for sale and everything was within their budget. We felt like Allan Sugar and Donald Trump all rolled into one! But few actually thought about the implications of a life spent in a rural village. Might not self-sufficiency be difficult, when you have never looked after a plant or a pet before? It's not actually sunny all year round. Winter can be bloody freezing and then there is the complex Bulgarian language.



The British in Britain harp on endlessly about immigrants who can't speak English. They harbour a deep resentment against anyone who would have the audacity to arrive on British soil without being absolutely fluent in English. Taking up residence here, this irony goes unnoticed as they proceed to shout louder and gesticulate more wildly, in the hope that Bulgarians will understand. Few villagers would really expect you to arrive speaking their small nation's incredibly difficult language, but they do appear a little shocked that most have no idea of Russian, French or German, all languages many "simple" rural people can actually use rather well. Welcome to neo-colonialism on a village scale. My wealth here gives me status and power. If you want a share, speak to me in Enger-lish!

Not surprisingly the number of British residents here in Bulgaria has fallen dramatically - from a peak apparently of about 40,000 in the boom times to about 5,000 now. Even for those prepared to make an effort to integrate, there have been pitfalls to navigate -

Many have fallen foul of unscrupulous British agents and tradesmen who preyed on gullible and frightened newcomers. Naturally distrustful of the foreign and non-English speaking Bulgarians, they turned to their fellow expats for assistance, only to lose everything. Stories of thousands of pounds sent for renovations which were never started, thefts and houses sold several times over are the expat urban myths of rural Bulgaria.

Loneliness, culture shock and alcoholism have also played a significant role, as have unrealistic financial planning or the complete lack of it in some cases. These people, however, have largely returned home, tail between their legs, once again to plug back into our cosy little social security system. Maybe that's the point to all this. We are a spoilt and privileged nation, and with the numerous financial safety nets Brits have to fall back on, we have little need for research or planning prior to making these life-altering decisions. If it all goes "belly up" we can go home and start again, courtesy of the State. We will be OK. A house, an income, healthcare and education, all for free. We can take enormous risks on crazy, un-thought through dreams based on little more than sunshine, and not worry about ending up with nothing, destitute and ruined. Maybe if we had to plan more and actually think about what we could lose, we wouldn't take such insane risks with our families' futures. But, that said, it's these very same attributes that have brought some Britons to successfully integrate in villages across Bulgaria. This new and vital human influx has given many rural communities a tiny but significant fighting chance, against the mass tide of urbanisation and the possibility of remaining on the world map for a few more decades to come.

The wood carving was one of two I have just bought from Svetlin Mitov who is a great wood sculptor who has a stall at the corner of the SUM building near the Mosque. This original cost only 40 euros!

Monday, October 22, 2012

[Worlds Apart at the Danube](#)



Today I remember [a good man who died exactly two years ago](#). Ion Olteanu was a friend who devoted much of his life to the youth of the country - encouraging them to get involved in their localities; to establish youth parliaments in their towns; and to make contact with their European counterparts. He was a philosopher by training and had the dry manner of the Romanian intellectual - but, unlike that class, had a passion and real commitment to make Romania a better place. And transmitted this to the teenagers he (and his wife) worked with. I saw this vividly at a

couple of the events he was kind enough to ask me to perform at.

I first met him in the Prime Minister's offices at Piata Victoria in the mid-1990s where he was responsible for the initial attempts to develop a strategy for working with non-governmental

organisations. I [wrote this paper for him](#). Faced with a reshuffle, he chose to leave the civil service and move to the hand-to-mouth world of international grants. I wasn't all that close to him although we did pop in unannounced from time to time to his flat in the centre of Bucharest which was, with its mass of files and papers, more like an office - not least with the other visitors. Last year [I dedicated a post on policy-making to him](#).

Today I devote this post to his memory. It is a post written spontaneously (ie I have no idea where it will go) on yet another glorious cloudless if nippy morning in the Carpathian mountains - between the Piatra Craiului and the Bucegi ranges. And written in this lovely old house given a new life by his friend and my partner for more than 20 years Daniela over the past 12 years. In her love of the vernacular Romanian architecture (and efforts to preserve it) she is in a tiny minority here in Romania - despite the [best efforts of Valentin Mandache](#) and [Sarah in Romania](#).

For reasons I don't yet pretend to understand, Bulgarians seem to value their traditional village houses much more than Romania - despite (or perhaps because) the socio-economic dereliction which has overtaken so many Bulgarian settlements. After its "liberation" in 1989 Romania went for the American dream - with all the "creative destruction" and modernist eyesores that involves. I was, therefore, delighted to purchase recently [a book which showcases some old restored houses here in Romania](#)

And also pleased to see [this post on one town's architectural heritage](#) by one of my favourite Romanian bloggers.

The pity is that people don't seem able to get together to cooperate properly here - the trust and respect which that requires seem for the moment to have been destroyed in this country. That's one of the things which Olteanu was fighting to restore.....

Alternating, as I have in the past 5 years, between Bulgaria and Romania has made me think a lot about cultural differences. Despite sharing the Danube as a border, the citizens of the two countries have (apart from the summer trips to the Bulgarian part of the Black Sea - which are such good value) little contact and know very little about each other. It hasn't helped that the Dobrogea area at the Black Sea has changed hands several times in the past few centuries - nor that the Bulgarian alphabet is Cyrillic and the Romanians so profoundly Latin

Although Romania attracts far fewer foreign residents (particularly Brits) than Bulgaria, it has [a fair number of ex-pat bloggers](#) - perhaps due to its exoticism. One of them talks feelingly [in the online book he has made of his blogs about the country](#)

A Romanian wife's fury is as legendary as it is short. In the morning, you can have your ear chewed off - my sins generally rotate around where I leave my shoes in the hall and woe betide me if by briefcase ever touches the kitchen table! There are constant bumps like this - yet by evening, she is back to chilled and happy as if we never argued at all.

Romanian girls do seem to work much harder in the home than their British counterparts. My wife is always scrubbing and cleaning our 1 bedroom apartment (we even took on a maid to further help!) You do need, however, to develop a skin like a rhino, as every small mistake you make in life is blown up into something significant, before floating away again into nothingness

British "boys" take the work of the Romanians partners/wives/whatever for granted. Their flats back in UK are much bigger, cleaned (daily or weekly) by a house keeper who is paid and doesn't the obligation to sleep with the flatowner. Those "boys" deeply think it is beneath their dignity to comply with some basic rules of domesticity and show the due respect for those hardworking women. It is easier to call them "nags", not pay attention to their "petty" bla-bla.

And two books have been produced recently by Brits on the country - William Blacker's elegant if controversial [Along the Enchanted Way](#); and Mike Ormsby's more gritty [Never Mind the Balkans, here's Romania](#). And here's [a recent documentary on the country which suggests that Ceaucescu's baneful influence is still active](#).

After several years of familiarity with Romania, I suddenly found myself based in Sofia. The Bulgarians were down-to-earth, modest and....well..bourgeois! Not least in the extent of small spaces in the centre where old and young alike can set up shop themselves - whether to sell cigarettes, haircuts, coffee, paintings or clothes. I've commented on this [here](#); [here](#); [here](#); [and here](#).

One of the key books on cultural values is Richard D Lewis's [When Cultures Clash - a complete version of which I have just discovered online](#). Some of the values he attributes to Bulgarians (on page 319) are disciplined, sober, pragmatic, cautious, stubborn, good organisers, industrious, inventive, lack of humour.

The terms he uses for Romanians are - pride in being a Balkan anomaly, opportunism, nepotism, volatility, self-importance, unpredictability, tendency to blame others, black humour.....

Certainly I know that my Romanian partner sometimes get impatient with what they - as tough, direct speakers - feel as the polite hypocrisy of Bulgarians! As a Scot who has felt the same about a certain type of Englishman, I know what they mean! Certainly I find it fascinating that Bulgarian paintings of the 20th century speak to me in a way which the Romanians don't..... Could be their price???

I feel an important project could be one focusing on Bulgarian-Romanian relations. The EU is putting a lot of money into trans-Danube projects - pity that cultural aspects don't seem to have been addressed.

I've reached the age when I think how the money I leave behind might be used to further passions of mine - whether conceptual or sensual. One idea which occurred to me recently was to leave a small fund which could encourage Bulgarian and Romanian painters/artists to come together once a year (starting with my village here!)

It would have been great to work with Olteanu on this!

The painting is an Atanas Mihov (1879-1974) - "washing at the Danube" which can be seen at the Russe Art Gallery

Wednesday, November 7, 2012

Private collections

A mixed experience at the recently re-opened National Gallery of Art here in Sofia. It had been closed for refurbishment for almost a year (still is [according to its website](#)) and, frankly, is worse than it was before - with one major room still under repair and a small and inferior exhibition of the Bulgarian classics. Only the first few paintings by Mitov, Murkvichka and Vesin stood out from the collection.

Sadly they also have a really stupid display of contemporary "art" taking up some of the restricted space. Hardly surprisingly, they could offer me no book on their permanent collection - although I was able to buy a very nicely presented book about [Alexander Bozhinov](#) which the Gallery had produced in 1999. It's amazing the number of such books about its artists which Bulgaria has produced over the years. I've built up a nice little library collection!

The saving grace was the superb temporary exhibition they have of Hungarian works from the [Gabor Kovacs collection](#) Gábor Kovács has been purchasing works of art for fifteen years, with the intention of creating a collection that offers a worthy representation of the history of modern Hungarian painting. Covering the period



from the early 18th century to the present, the collection is comprised of more than 250 masterpieces.

The collection offers an almost complete account of the development that began with the Romantic and Realistic landscape representations of the 19th century, continued with the plein air painting of the [Nagybánya school](#) (now Baie Mare in Romania) and ended with the "isms" of the first decades of the 20th century. Continuously enlarged, the Gábor Kovács Collection is one of the most prestigious private art collections in Hungary.

János Vaszary was one artist who caught my eye.

This is the first time I have seen an exhibition of a private collector - and follows hard on my spotting a stunning new book in the Humanitas bookshop in Bucharest about Romanian art collectors. It was in Romanian - but profusely illustrated and showing that we are not alone in our walls being crammed with paintings. In trying to find reference to it online, I came across this [interesting site about private art collections in central Europe](#) which contains [this useful entry on Bulgaria's first collectors](#)



Thursday, November 8, 2012

The 1944 communist takeover of Bulgaria

It was a throwaway phrase in the introduction to the superb Alexander Bozhinov book which I picked up earlier in the week which alerted me "Stoyan Venev pled for him before the People's Court". So even this Bulgarian trailblazer of satire (67 years of age when the communists swept into power in September 1944) was caught in the net of deranged and murderous suspicion (by virtue apparently of his foreign travels and bourgeois life-style) and condemned to a year in prison. He was lucky - compared to the fate of thousands of his compatriots!

As I was compiling my little book on Bulgarian Realist painters of the 20th Century I had noticed that many had had to emigrate in the immediate aftermath of the communist takeover - whether from painting (into cinema or theatre design) or from the country altogether. And that some who remained in the country (like Nikola Boiadjiev and Boris Denev) were totally banned from any artistic endeavour. But I had not understood just how savage the communist takeover in Bulgaria was in 1944 - by far and away the worst in the Soviet bloc.

Forgive the length of this post - but we owe it to those killed in such circumstances to remember them - particularly when the nature of their demise is known by so few outside the country. A [recent issue of the Vagabond journal has the clearest statement](#)

The killings of opponents of the Soviet system started as early as 9 September 1944, the very day the Communists seized power in Bulgaria.



Nobody knows how many Bulgarians lost their lives in the first weeks of the "people's democracy," their only crime being their political opinion or their social position. However, the number of victims of the so-called People's Court, which was created to give legitimacy to the murder of politicians, artists, writers and even physicians considered "dangerous" to the new regime, is well documented. From December 1944 to April 1945 the court issued 9,550 verdicts, with 2,680 death sentences and 1,921 life terms. To understand why the Bulgarian Communists were a lot more cruel than anyone else in Europe at the time one needs to go no further than the numbers: the Nuremberg Trials against top Nazis issued just 17 death sentences.

If you are looking for a single day when the Bulgarian political class was decimated with one blow, you get 1 February 1945. On that day the People's Court sentenced to death 67 MPs and 22 ministers who had held office between 1940 and 1944, including the former prime ministers Dobri Bozhilov and Ivan Bagryanov. Also killed were the regents Prince Kiril, Bogdan Filov and General Nikola Mihov, nine secretaries to the palace, publishers and journalists of national newspapers, and 47 generals and senior military. They were shot dead on the same day, beside an unused pit left on the outskirts of the Sofia Central Cemetery after the Allied air-strikes in the winter of 1943-1944, and were buried on the spot. The mass grave was left unmarked and several years later was turned into an ordinary burial ground. In 1995, in lot 124 of the cemetery, a monument to the victims of 1 February 1945 was finally erected. The following year the Supreme Court posthumously repealed the death sentences.

The victims of the People's Court are just a fraction of the number of Bulgarians who suffered various forms of repression during Communism. Between 1944 and 1989 thousands of opponents of the regime were detained, interned or denied education or work advancement. The reasons for the repression were

many and varied: accusations – usually bogus – of espionage and plotting against the Communist state, or opposing the forced collectivisation of agricultural land, or disagreeing with the Bulgarianisation policies toward the country's Muslims. Telling political jokes, wearing mini-skirts, having a "bourgeois" past or the "wrong" relatives could all land you in a labour camp. So could listening to Elvis Presley music. The total number of those repressed between 1944 and 1990 is estimated at about 300,000.

And a [website devoted to the communist takeovers and rule in Central Europe is even more specific](#)

The date of the communist coup – 9 September 1944 – was a signal for revenge and the start of blood-drenched Bacchanalia on the territory of the entire country. The victims of the class wrath were not only politicians, businessmen, lawyers, civil servants, police and army officers. The self-proclaimed "people's revengers" attacked the Bulgarian intellectuals with the same zealotry: teachers, priests, journalists, writers, editors, artists, professors, lecturers and all kinds of people of the pen, of culture and of the spirit perished without trial or sentence in the cities, little towns and villages. It would be logical to ask ourselves why was the country's cultural elite branded and persecuted as the most dangerous "enemy of the people"?

The indictment produced by the Sixth Panel of the so-called "People's Tribunal" attached the following qualifications to the cultural elite: "career-seeking intelligentsia that had lost its touch with the people", "public evil that needs to be cut out so that it would not contaminate the public organism", "mercenaries of the pen and of speech", "instigators and collaborationists" of the persons responsible for the national catastrophe, etc. The answer is very well known: propped on the bayonets of the occupiers, the communist upper crust followed the example of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917-1921. Without choosing its means, it showed determination to deprive the nation of the voice of free speech, and – as it proclaimed itself – "to cut the democratic values from the public organism", to obliterate the notions of democracy, freedom and fatherland from public space, the carrier of these notions being the patriotic intelligentsia.

Thinking people are a barrier before any dictatorship, therefore the first task of usurpers is terror and genocide on a mass scale against the intellectual class.

Outstanding representatives of Bulgarian culture perished without trial or sentence in the first wave of the red terror: Danail Krapchev – journalist, writer and editor of the Zora [Dawn] newspaper, Yordan Badev – literary critic, Nencho Iliev-Sirius – writer, Konstantin Gindev – talented young poet, Boris Roumenov – satirist, Professor Lyubomir Vladikin, Rayko Alexiev – humorist, satirist and cartoonist, publisher of the Shtourets [Cricket] newspaper, beaten to death in prison.

A second large group of writers, journalists, scholars, artists and intellectuals were thrown into the Central Prison in Sofia and were given sentences of different length, combined with confiscations and fines. Among them were the writers Zmey Goryanin, Fani Popova, Yordan Stoubel, Dimiter Simidov, Georgi Kanazirski, Boris Makovski, the cartoonists Konstantin Kamenov, Alexander Bozhinov and Alexander Dobrinov, the journalists Hristo Bruzitsov, Krustyo Velyanov, Atanas Damyanov and Stefan Damyanov, Stefan Tanev, Matey Bonchev-Brushlyan, Dr. Peter Djidrov, Dimiter Gavriyski, who wrote for the leading daily papers in Bulgaria: Zora, Utro, Dvenvik, Slovo, etc., as well as dozens of other eminent figures in the sphere of culture.

That group also included Professor Stefan Konsoulov, Professor Georgi P. Genov, the literary historian Professor Mihail Arnaudov, Minister of Education in Bagryanov's government for two months. Their life in prison is colourfully described in the miraculously preserved notes of Zmey Goryanin, "Sketches and Stories". Even when they were at such a critical moment in their lives and their endurance was put to the test, these internationally famous scholars succeeded in preserving their dignified behaviour and continued to live with their science and with their ideas. Their example has proven that only a man of the spirit is capable of bringing light, sensibility and nobility during times of sinister arbitrariness and

social cataclysms, that only man's creative genius has the strength of withstanding the sinister downfalls of history.

A part of the intellectuals who passed through the cells of the State Security and of the Central Prison were dispatched without trial or sentence directly to concentration camps that had been established under a special law and were given the name of labour-correctional communities: Bogdanov Dol, Koutsiyan, Rossitsa, Sveti Vrach, Belene, Doupnitsa, etc., where the writers Dimiter Talev, Slavcho Krassinski, Chavdar Moutafov, Pavel Spasov, Zvezdelin Tsonev and Yordan Vulchev, as well as the artists Alexander Bozhinov, Alexander Dobrinov and Konstantin Kamenov, were sent. A new phenomenon – political-literary toponymy – emerged in the geography of the Bulgarian literature. It linked the colourful names of small villages, localities and small towns in the countryside with the saga of prominent writers and creative artists. The spiritual elite of Bulgaria were banished to mines and stone quarries, to be replaced in the cultural centres by aggressive ignorance, marginal individuals and vulgarity.

The concentration camps turned into coexisting spaces accumulating the energies of violence and the suffering, amongst which the freedom-loving spirit of the Bulgarian nation waned and died. New martyrs were added to the prisoners of the first wave shortly after 9 September 1944 in 1946-1947: together with thousands of opposition figures from the Nikola Petkov Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union and the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, emblematic names of the legal opposition became victims of terror, having stood up against the hegemony of the camouflage Fatherland Front: Trifon Kounev and Tsveti Ivanov – Editors-in-Chief of the newspapers Narodno Zemedelsko Zname [People's Agrarian Banner] and Svoboden Narod [Free People], and also writers, journalists, public figures and freedom fighters. Standing at the crucial historic dividing line, they were condemned to suffer both for their political and moral compromises, and for their dignified and valiant fight to defend the democratic ideals and the independence of Bulgaria. Together with political leaders like Nikola Petkov and Krustyu Pastouhov, the writers carried on their shoulders the heavy cross of their re-enslaved nation and proved that the real artist is ready for self-sacrifice to defend his national dignity.

During the autumn of 1944, more than 30 thousand peaceful Bulgarian citizens were killed: slaughtered with axes, bludgeoned to death, shot at point blank, thrown off cliffs into precipices, burned, hanged or buried alive. The sense of impunity and arbitrariness, encouraged openly or behind the scenes by the leaders of the ruling Communist Party, notably Georgi Dimitrov, Traycho Kostov, Tsola Dragoycheva and Anton Yugov, made the public atmosphere fraught with aggressiveness of the reactions and with frenetic hatred. Mass paranoia, thirst for blood and vindictiveness flared. Frenetic mobs shouting death slogans attacked homes and offices, lynched, stampeded and clubbed to death innocent people in the streets merely because a finger had been pointed at them as "enemies of the people."

That was not a nationwide revolution, nor an uprising, nor a civil war, because there were no two fighting armed groups, as in 1923 during the insurgence. That was a political slaughterhouse. Life and the individual had lost their value, humanity was trampled and forgotten in the gigantic social and geopolitical collision. After World War II, when Bulgaria did not have even one casualty at the frontline, instead of peace and a spirit of constructivism on the basis of the protected status quo, the country was involved in a catastrophic psychological situation of self-extermination and moral genocide.

The land of Bulgaria was covered with thousands of secret graves, its tolerant people were desecrated by fratricide and were stained with the blood of its own worthiest and most talented sons. The mass act of insanity reveals how it is possible with the mechanisms of ideology and politics to bring to extremes the mentality of the community so as to be directed in the service of party, power and imperialist goals. The unabated wartime aggression of the masses was easy to manipulate and to transform into political revenge-seeking by ideological profiteers and central offices of the party.

The normal behavioural thresholds of the extremist individual were deliberately undermined in the direction of regression and barbarianisation so as to serve hidden power goals. And again, literature anticipated, caught and depicted the shadows of horror, fear and death in the spiritual space of Bulgaria. The writer Yana Yazova, a contemporary and witness of the events, recreated both concrete events and the frenzied rhythm of historical time, revealing its paranoid symbols and states. In her political and psychological novel "War", which was published in 2001, i.e., 25 years after her death and 55 years after the actual events, Yana Yazova documented the social, political and existential psychological motivations of terror and hatred, depicting the traumatically distorted mentality and the images of the "revengers" susceptible to manipulation, as well as the sufferings of the defenceless victims.

Bulgaria had apparently about 100 concentration camps in the post-war period to deal with its various "dissidents" – in most cases those whose dress or joke sense was not acceptable. [Voices from the Gulag – life and death in communist Bulgaria](#)(1999) looks in harrowing detail at this.

The photograph of [bombed Sofia in 1944 is one of a series](#)

Sunday, November 11, 2012

[New painters - and wine](#)



I'm not the only one casting my mind back to the murderous behaviour from which this part of the world has suffered in the past century as Empires came unstuck and national fervour gripped men's minds. [Eastern Approaches](#) and [Open Education](#) both have postings on the Balkan Wars of a hundred years ago. These (and other) wars were, of course, an important focus for many Bulgarian painters some of whom were official war artists. [My booklet on Bulgarian Realist painters](#) was very much a first draft – I felt if I waited for the missing information on various painters, nothing would ever be produced. And it's only now that I'm back in Sofia that I can

think properly about its distribution – so far it has been sent only to the Sofia galleries, to Regional municipal galleries and to EC Embassies in Sofia. With encouraging responses (apart from the Embassies!) It's a useful calling card to show how serious I am! Now I need to approach the big Hotels – and the National Gallery who (amazingly) don't really have anything for the foreign visitor.

And, slowly I can update the entries both on artists and galleries. Yesterday was a good example. The Inter Nos Gallery (sadly its website no longer seems active) is just at the junction of Bvds Levski and Ignatieff (just round the corner from where Alexander Bozhinov built his house in Nikolai Pavlovich St) and has I think the best collection of the Bulgarian Realist painters in the country.

This wasn't obvious to me on my first few visits – and I got to feeling guilty about visiting more since I haven't so far bought anything.

But when Dr Stephanov saw my booklet, he opened up and I discovered some great paintings - and promises of more since (like many other Sofia galleryists) they have more stuff stored away in inaccessible places than on display.

So, for example, one painter whose name was known to me - **Constantine Mikrenski** (1921-1999) - suddenly started to look very interesting (eg the one at the top of this post). My entry about him in the book is no more than his date of birth and death.

Why is it that I want to know more about the (dead) painters I like? Technically, it adds little to my appreciation - perhaps its intimations of mortality?

There are a lot of articles (and books) predicting the disappearance of the book. [New Criterion has published an article with a very elegant \(and passionate\) defence of the book](#) (and elegy to the death of second-hand bookshops) which I thoroughly recommend

Once, staying overnight at an airport hotel in Los Angeles, I found myself without a book. How this happened I can no longer recall; it was most unusual, for by far the most useful lesson that life has taught me, and one that I almost always heed, is never to go anywhere without a book. (In Africa, I have found that reading a book is an excellent way of overcoming officials' obstructionism. They obstruct in order to extract a bribe to remove the obstruction; but once they see you settled down for the long term, as it were, with a fat book, Moby-Dick, say, they eventually recognize defeat.

Indeed, I owe it to African officialdom that I have read Moby-Dick; I might otherwise never have got through it.) Reduced in my Los Angeles room to a choice between television and the yellow pages—no doubt now also on the verge of extinction—I chose the yellow pages, and there discovered just how unusual my obsession with books was. I looked up bookstores, and found no more than half a page. Teeth-whitening dentists, on the other hand, who promised a completely renewed existence to their clients, a confident smile being the secret of success, and success of happiness, took up more than twenty pages. Not poets, then, but teeth-whitening dentists, are now the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Now sipping a superb new Bulgarian Chardonnay - Ethno - produced in the [village of Sungurlare](#) inland from Burgas on the Black Sea.

Monday, November 12, 2012

[Last sanctuaries of originality](#)

In the increasingly homoeogenised world in which we sadly now exist, second-hand bookshops and private art galleries are the last sanctuaries of originality, discovery and ambience.

My booklet on Bulgarian Realist painters lists 16 private galleries here in Sofia - focussing on those which sell the more classic painters of the last century. Almost by definition, there's not much room to move around in such galleries - most of the paintings are in piles against the wall in storerooms. They have a great atmosphere - compared with the more clinical aspect of some contemporary galleries. The Inter Nos Gallery - which I mentioned yesterday - is a perfect example of that atmosphere.



or

Valerie Filipov is an interesting example of a dealer who used to have such an Aladdin's Cave but now operates in the more clinical setting of The Impression Art Gallery, 11 Vasil Levski Bvd which holds special exhibitions of contemporary artists. Trouble with this approach is that it takes less than 5 minutes to see the display! I vastly preferred the serendipity of his previous Cave!



Last week I said hello to Biliana Djingova who opened [the A and B gallery](#) last year at 45, Tsar Assen St for special exhibitions of contemporaries - and was very taken with Maria Bogdanova, a few of whose works are showing (see above) - as are her husband's. A wonderful balance of precision, colour and humour. Bulgaria is lucky at the moment in having a few artists (eg Angela Minkova, Natasha Atanassova, Nikolai Tiholov) who have this combination. This is a Tiholov of mine

And yesterday I visited the small [Loran Gallery](#) and discovered a painter from the early part of last century - Petko Zadgorski (1902-1974).

The Gallery had marked his birthday with a recent exhibition of his work. They also carried on their nice tradition of publishing a catalogue to go with the exhibition and have [quite a few of his paintings for sale on their well-organised website](#).

Zadgorski was born in Sliven but spent most of his life at Burgas where he developed his love of the sea - as you can see from this example of his painting. And the Burgas Municipal Gallery (one of the few I have so far not been able to visit) [has a nice little outline of his work](#)

The Loran Gallery seems to be the best organised of all the private galleries I know - frequent special exhibitions, catalogues to promote the artists, a good reserve of paintings for sale, active website.....Of course The Victoria Gallery, as Sofia's only auction house, [has a great website](#) and catalogue for each of its auctions (there's one on Thursday) when more than 200 artefacts are usually for sale.



Regular readers will know I am a great fan of [Astry Gallery](#) here in Sofia whose owner Vihra Pesheva singlehandedly seeks out and promotes living artists - young and old - with frequent special exhibitions and materials. But the reason Astry Gallery scores is that so much is crammed into such a small space; that Vihra shares her enthusiasm so readily; and I never feel I am imposing..... This is [what I said last year](#) about the Gallery -

Astry Gallery (under Vihra's tutelage) is unique for me amongst the Sofia galleries in encouraging contemporary Bulgarian painting. Two things are unique - first the frequency of the special exhibitions; but mainly that Vihra follows her passion (not fashion). I am not an art professional - but Vihra has a real art of creating an atmosphere in which people like me can explore. I have been to a couple of other exhibition openings here and they were, sadly, full of what I call "pseuds" - people who talked loudly (mostly Embassy people) and had little interest in the paintings (except perhaps their investment value). Vihra and her Astry Gallery attract real people who share her passion and curiosity. It is always a joy to pop in there - and talk to her, visitors, artists, other collectors and her father.

And that is also the case with Yassen Gollevi of [Konus Gallery](#) who is in his own right a serious painter and teacher at the Art Academy.

Wednesday, November 14, 2012

Who wants to be The European Capital of Culture - and why??



Bulgaria is one of the few EU member states which has not so far seen one of its cities designated as a [European City \(since 1999 "Capital"\) of Culture](#) - although in 2019 one Bulgarian city will play this role. 10 Bulgarian cities are bidding for the designation - with [Sofia's strong bid](#) facing [stiff competition from Plovdiv's](#) and other well-placed cities such as Varna, Burgas and Veliko Tarnovo. (The photo is, appropriately, of Plovdiv's Roman forum - the "bread and circus" predecessor of the European Capital of Culture - discovered only in the 1970s

when they were digging a road construction)
"I belong to Glasgow"

[Glasgow](#) was one of Europe's first cities to have this title (in 1990) and I was a leading Regional politician during the previous 15 years of regeneration efforts which culminated in this award - and in 1990 I had the great pleasure during the opening ceremonies of a private lunch with Melina Mercouri who, when Greek Minister of Culture, invented the concept.

Historical footnote; I was in my kilt and struck (in those days) quite a fine figure. I got the eye from Melina and was invited to join the small table she had with an attractive Berlin Senator. My (Presbyterian) mother was with me and knew Melina only from her infamous film role as a prostitute. Melina and I (as Socialists) got on like a house on fire but when I back to the table where I had left my Mum in the tender care of a boring Latin scholar and asked if she would like to meet my new friend, she responded tartly - "Certainly not!"

The "Glasgow model" is still talked about in positive terms. See, for example, two slide presentations which compare the Glasgow and Liverpool (2008) experiences [here](#) and [here](#)

Some basic facts

It is all too easy for municipal leaders to get excited about the prestige of a European award - particularly when its economic impact lies so far in the future by which time it is highly unlikely the leaders will still be around. A note of scepticism is needed. The European Union is very clever with these designations which carry (directly at any rate) very little European funding. Over the 25 years of experience, the average cost of the scheme has been 35 million euros - and only 2% of this has been covered by EC funding! The cost has, of course, ranged from 5-6 million euros of the Bergen and Prague years (2000) to no less than 232 million for Thessalonika's year in the spotlight (1997) And 99% of the funding of the latter was public. I've taken the figures from page 70 of the detailed [Palmer report for the EC on the impact of the concept](#) (Palmer, it should be noted was the Director of the Glasgow 1990 project - now with his own International Cultural Consultancy company)



A basic question

So the question for the Bulgarian government and city leaders is how much should they put up - with what sort of hopes for its impact?

At a time of great austerity, are realistic calculations being made for the running costs of new infrastructure being proposed?

Most European cities are having difficulties paying the wage and other running costs of existing libraries and swimming pools - let alone having the budget for increased staffing. Maribor (Slovenia) is just finishing its European City of Culture spell - and is [already experiencing this problem](#) - with cultural groups being set against one another as a result - and [Istanbul\(2010\) also experienced serious problems](#)

On the other hand the [EC has also published its own \(positive\) spin on the experience](#) of the past 25 years - which looks more at results than processes.

Some experience

The [Glasgow authorities made their own positive assessment of impact - 17 years later](#). But there is another side to the story - which was set out in 2004 in a [useful assessment of the Glasgow experience](#). It did not mince its words

In the narratives deployed by those who advocate city marketing and re-imagining, cities such as Glasgow are all too frequently reified and presented as homogeneous locales of common interests. But 'Glasgow' does not 'do' things, it is not an agent and it is not 'Glasgow' that 'wins' or 'loses', or that is undergoing a 'renewal', but particular (and if recent evidence is anything to go by, fewer) groups of its citizens living in particular parts of the City.

The type of strategy adopted in Glasgow - 'the Glasgow model' - has contributed to the worsening levels of poverty and deprivation and to the deepening inequalities that characterise the City today. It has done this primarily by constructing Glasgow's future - and the future for tens of thousands of Glaswegians - as a low paid, workforce grateful from the breadcrumbs from the tables of the entrepreneurs and investors upon

which so much effort is spent in attracting and cossetting - and by marginalising and ruling out any alternative strategy based upon large scale public sector investment in sustainable and socially necessary facilities and services.

While wishing to avoid any romanticisation of manufacturing employment, it is nonetheless notable that this now accounts for less than 10% of employment in the City (source: OECD, 2002, p. 46).

There appears to have been little effort to secure quality manufacturing employment of a type that might be attractive to many of those out of work and which might offer full-time, sustainable work of a better quality than that on offer in the 'cappuccino' economy that is now such a pervasive feature of the city centre.

The paper quotes from a critical 1990 article

... the Year of Culture has more to do with power politics than culture. It has more to do with millionaire developers than art ... In 1990, willy-nilly, everything is surrendered, once you join in the enterprise, for above all 1990 makes an unequivocal statement on behalf of corporate wealth.

So that in 1990 it is more a question of art sponsoring big business, promoting the new tourist drive and giving aid and comfort to a shallow ethos of yuppie greed. And for all this of course the people of Glasgow will be made to foot the bill. (McLay, 1990, p. 87)

Lessons - and key elements in any successful approach

If there is one lesson from the 25 years' experience, it is that the process needs, from the outset, to involve all possible local groups - whether performing, musical, artistic, media, literary, tourist, community, ethnographic, archeological, vinocultural (!) etc..... It is impossible to get a consensus amongst such groups -whether at strategic or implementations stages. But the effort has to be made - to build up the trust that is needed to have a sustainable and successful result. And cooperation is not easy in southern European countries such as Greece and Italy let alone ex-communist Balkan countries - where cronyism is so rampant and fair selection of contractors and beneficiaries a rare thing.

Key words, however, I would urge on those involved would be trust, transparency, inclusiveness, learning (from the experience of others), realism and modesty (in spending commitments), scepticism (of a lot of the material and claims made on the subject); and distinctiveness (don't copy - recognise and build on your distinctive characteristics).

NB

I am, it should be noted, [no great fan of mega-efforts such as Olympics](#). And I would also advise those involved to spend time looking at the experience not only of the many other cities who have so far been the recipient of this award but of other big events. There are some good overviews (with extensive links) available [here](#); [here](#); and [here](#).

Sofia - so far

Given [my various posts on Sofia and its attractions](#), I obviously feel that Sofia would be a worthy city. for this accolade - not least because so many of its residents seem insufficiently aware of its attractions. The reason the designation was so important to Glasgow (when it was made in 1986 or so) was that it altered the perception of the city - both for outsiders and residents.

Sofia also needs such a boost - and [seems already to be going about it in the right way](#). And I like the contributions which some citizens are already beginning to make to the discussion about what it

should be for - in this series on [provocateur of the month](#)

Update (Jan 2015); in fact Plovdiv won!

Monday, November 19, 2012

Bulgarian Wine - as Culture



Well I certainly learned a lot more about Bulgarian wines over the weekend - both in the biblical sense (experience) and intellectually. Particularly about the more pricey wines I would never normally buy. You can such great quality here for 2/3 euros a litre that I would never pay more than 8 euros a bottle! I discover (through a great little book "Catalogue of Bulgarian Wines 2013" (available for 15 leva [at branches of Casavino](#) here) that there are at least 97 independent wineries in this small country - each with several brand names with its own range of wines. And 250 of them were available for tasting over the weekend (as this was the elite, this suggest that there are more than 500 different wines in the country!)

I was more disciplined yesterday, perfecting the swill and spit - and, even then, physically not able to taste too many reds because of the semi-revulsion my body has developed to them. One exception was [a fascinating anti-oxidant red wine - Alfa Vita](#) - which adds a strong medical tone to its marketing. It certainly was smooth and tasty. The CEO I spoke to (also the driving force behind the local Academy for Wine) was kind enough to give me a bottle in exchange for a copy of my booklet on Bulgarian realist painters! And advised me to drink 50 ml or so for breakfast!! At 5 euros a bottle, it's just what the doctor ordered!

One of my goals yesterday was to savour the Roses on offer - I have never been a great fan of these but, as my taste for reds has declined, so the few Roses I have come across have become more interesting. And there is a great choice here!

Two stalls left the greatest impression - **Villa Yustina** (established only in 2006 and located in a village in the Rhodopes foothills near Plovdiv) by virtue of the enthusiastic and helpful approach of their sales guy Vencislav Lyubenov. And the stall of the well known **Katarzyna Estate** (located on the Greek/Turkish border) - by virtue of it being the only one whose staff (women) were encouraging feedback from their customers.

The wine fair was so popular the second day that it was almost impossible to move from stall to stall! As each visitor left, they were presented with free copies of the (massive glossy) [DiVine magazine](#) which sponsored the fair. Intriguingly the cover picture is of champagne bottles in a picture frame - is this a case of the wineries bidding to be included in the European Capital of Culture?

There is a serious argument to be made for eating and wine drinking as a serious cultural pursuit - perhaps the Divine magazine should consider having a few pages on Bulgarian painting (and other cultural material) in each of its future issues? Interestingly there was a good place on Kurnigradska St (almost at the corner with Vitosha) which offered a heady mix of paintings, wines, books and musical performance. It is now not more - not at least at that address - although a new little gallery has opened in Tsar Samuil St (off Solunska) which mixes wines and aquarelles!! *The aquarelle is - of course - an.....Ilyia Beshkov - from the superb 1950s book I bought from Alexander....*

Wednesday, November 21, 2012

wine as medicine



November seems to be the period for testing the Sofia medical systems - this time last year I blogged about an experience with [the excellent Military Hospital here](#) which resulted in a diagnosis of excessive uric acid and a savage diet for a month with no wine. I've been suffering for some time from some degeneration of the knee tissue - result probably of rowing, jogging, tennis and badminton over the past 50 years (did I tell you I trained with the Azeri youth badminton team a decade ago??!!). It was in Baku I had my

first treatment of the knee with electrodes (20 years earlier I had a guy with a hypnotic medallion massage the knee briefly and cure a pain which physiotherapists had not been able to shift. Since I came off a Kyrgyzstan mountain/hill climb in 2006 the knees have been weak and no one has been able to give me a decent diagnosis - let alone treatment (despite MRS etc) In April, however, a Sofia specialist ran some doppler and other tests and reckoned it was linked to some spinal weakness - so here I am now having some excellent physiotherapy in the Military Hospital. The Doctor who supervises the treatment gave me on Monday the most thorough and professional examination which I have received in a decade - and has me now undergoing a 10 day course of magnetic, electric and manual treatment. And in a section of the hospital whose walls are adorned with paintings (for sale). Great idea! So hats off to the Bulgarians - not least because we exchange tips about Bulgarian wine as it proceeds. Pavel Banyia is the place I had been advised to go for the best Spa experience (in the heart of the country) but it was fully booked. [Her advice was Hisar](#) - for both the thermal waters and wine (StareSel).

Speaking of which - as I walked back from the Hospital (aided by my antique vanity cane - which is great for smacking badly-parked cars!) I discovered another of the charming regional wine shops which are scattered around Sofia. So far I have come across shops selling Vidin; Magura; Karnovat wines and today I passed I tiny shop which had a huge advertisement about Belogradchik wines (like the first 2 in the North-East). I had driven through the village (Borovitsa) last year but not stopped and decided this time therefore (blindtaste) to buy 2 litres of a Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc mix - for less than 5 euros. Back home, the taste was impeccable!! And a lovely little wine shop with quality wines at reasonable prices has opened at the Russian

monument on the corner of Makedonski and Skobelev Bvds (although its situated in the latter, its address is the former!). It's the initiative of a young man - and is typical of the attitude and spirit here. It's love of wine which has driven him - not big business connections. I wouldn't find this in Bucharest.

I'm also glad to see that one of the Bulgarian wineries - [Light Castle](#) - is supporting Astry Gallery - being one of the sponsors of Vihra's [latest annual 30x30 exhibition](#).

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

You are where you live

A [Samuel Pepys](#) - (or [Marcel Proust](#) -) type entry today.

Thanks to a couple of recent moves in my accommodation I'm seeing another side of Sofia. At the weekend I moved a little but further from the centre - trying to keep the rental low since I'm here only for a few months (if that) but would ideally like to keep somewhere to have as a base for my things and for the occasional visit. But I've been spoiled in the places I've had and just cannot adjust to the soullessness of these cheaper rented places.

The young woman showing me the various flats told me the impact I had made when I said I needed bookshelves - "no one reads here" she exclaimed "but it does make people respect you!" And the lack of reading certainly shows in the absence, in any of the flats I looked at, of reading lights. I just don't understand how people can live in places with only overhead lights! And what is advertised as "furnished" often means little more than kitchen facilities (often with dishwasher!), a bed, table and chairs. No cooking utensils, bedsheets, lamps or radio. Fortunately I travel with cooking stuff, don't need television and had bought a couple of antique carpets for the bare floors - but unfortunately I need storage space for bikes and car parking facilities not too far away. So I've had to settle (for 300 euros a month) for a rather tawdry and shoddy new build-flat - largely on the basis that it seemed reasonably clean and had the space for my wheels! But I'm not sure how long I can put up with the place.

I also have a hateful heating system (hot air being blown through air conditioners) simple because the central heating here in Sofia is so expensive. A monopoly supplier has forced more and more people to disconnect - driving the prices for those who remain even higher. So it is much cheaper to have electric heating which you control - particularly if you're living there intermittently.

I continue to enjoy walking (and cycling) around Sofia - even in [the snow and ice which have graced the streets this week](#) - the small shops and galleries (and cheap and pleasant eating and drinking) invite so (the Elephant second-hand Bookshop with English books has relocated into larger premises in the centre and opens today!) But the cosy small flats in Bucharest and Ploiesti are definitely beginning to beckon.

Trouble is that I would have to dump the bikes (no storage or cycling conditions up there) and also some of the paintings! Choices!

I was hoping to add to my little library on Bulgarian art by a visit to the underground second-hand bookshop at the University last week. It did indeed have quite a range of 1960s-1990s books on particular artists - but at extortionate prices for battered and nondescript things of less than 100 pages. The average price was 30 euros. What Bulgarian can afford such prices?

But, just 5 minutes (and hidden) away in a courtyard at Vassil Levski 87, there is a small second-hand bookshop which offers a not dissimilar range at a quarter of those prices. I got a couple of

nice little books on the satirist -Stoyan Venev - and the shaper of Bulgarian painting - Jaroslav Vesin

Monday, January 14, 2013

different municipal styles

Over the past 6 years, I've basically spent most of the winters in Sofia and the summers (apart from 2008) in the Carpathian mountain house - with 6-7 weeks each year in Bucharest. So I'm in [a good position to compare and contrast two \(neighbouring\) countries](#) which are enjoying only their second brief period of freedom after half a century of communist control and several centuries of Ottoman domination. Each has its reasons for feeling different eg Romanian a romantic language in a sea of Slavs; Bulgarian still Cyrillic in its lettering.

Romania is aggressive - both in the size of its buildings and in social behaviour - Bulgaria much more modest in these respects. For more on the differences, [see this post](#).

Yesterday I noted another difference - under the control of Sofia municipality, the Sofia City Art Gallery (to which [this blog has often paid tribute](#)) flourishes. Under the control of Bucharest municipality, 5,000 paintings apparently languish with nowhere to be displayed - apart from 2 rooms donated by [ArtMark](#) which manage to display about 15 of them. A rich Romanian émigré with an empty palace in the city offered the Bucharest mayor the palace rent-free to give the paintings an outlet - but the offer was turned down. Too much trouble for the lazy mayor [whose favourite hobby is demolishing such old buildings](#).

Bucharest and Sofia appeared recently at the very bottom of the list of livable European cities - but Sofia at least tries and has indeed [many features which make it highly attractive](#). It's where I go to cycle, swim and wander pleasurably visiting friends in small galleries!



The gouache is a Zhelezarov - of Sofia's women's market

Thursday, February 21, 2013

[A prayer for Bulgaria](#)



While I was tucked in my (private) hospital bed for my first ever overnight in a hospital (for some diagnostic work), the Bulgarian Government resigned! The thought of state hospitals not being acceptable to me was just too much of a vote of non-confidence for them! That's what I call true accountability! Or was it just that the Prime Minister felt unable to continue without the benefit of my blog??

High electricity bills had sparked off protests more than a week ago in all Bulgarian cities and the foreign-owned electricity companies (Czechia and Austria) who have monopolies in each of the Regions had been the focus of the discontent. The much-quoted doubling of prices is a distortion since the last bills for a longer and colder month than the previous - but the 60 euros I paid this Monday for a one-bedroom flat whose heating I control is excessive for the many people whose total monthly earnings is no more than 200 euros. On Monday the head of the Deputy Prime Minister was thrown to the crowds - with promises of reduced prices and the revoking of the licence of the Czech electricity company.

But the demonstrations continued and so the Prime Minister resigned his entire government - and this was [accepted by an overwhelming majority of parliamentarians yesterday](#). So now we are in the same situation Romania was in exactly a year ago - when demonstrations against austerity measures in that country took it from the frying pan into the fire - a new Prime Minister who [quickly was exposed as a plagiarist](#); then [ran into conflict with the European Union on fundamental issues of rule of law](#); and who orchestrated an unsuccessful (on a technicality) [Presidential impeachment](#); but faced and won a general elections in the autumn - which changed nothing.

I pray that Bulgaria will avoid such chaos.

Sunday, February 24, 2013

[Bulgarian demonstrations move to constitutional revolution](#)

"A plague on the political classes" - that's what people have been shouting in the streets and squares all week in both Italy and Bulgaria. Here in Sofia a helicopter has been circling the skies for several hours as the demonstrations have moved into a new phase - putting pressure on the President to try to ensure that the outcomes of decisions he takes in this political vacuum offer the long-suffering Bulgarian people a bit more confidence.

The high electricity charges which sparked the events which led to the fall of the Bulgarian government last Tuesday are seen as a reflection of the payoffs politicians receive from businessmen who now control the privatised facilities. The demonstration leaders met with the

President in the morning and he made supportive noises. An [interesting article sketches what is going on](#)

Demonstrators have been persistently rejecting attempts of opposition parties, including the BSP and the ultra-nationalists VMRO and "Ataka", to take advantage of the protests. There have been scuffles with those who tried to raise partisan politics during demonstrations, and people even chanted "No parties!"

The goal of these protests is not to topple one political party to have another take power and bring the country to another crisis, nor is it to demand just normal prices of electricity. On the economic side, the demands are: scrapping of contracts with the electricity companies and nationalising them; putting those who signed them on trial; revision of electricity bills with citizen participation; declassification of the contracts for all privatisation deals in the last 24 years; revision of all concession contracts for the past 24 years; and ceasing privatisation processes.

On the political side, demands have gone even further to seek an overhaul of the political system in Bulgaria. They have made clear that the system has to be changed in such a way that when the next party comes to power, it can no longer behave the way all governments in Bulgaria have for the past 24 years. There have to be checks on political power and mechanisms to prevent collusion between politicians, private economic interests and organised crime.

Protesters are currently calling for a Constituent Assembly to be formed to change the constitution and develop mechanisms of direct involvement of citizens in government matters. There have been proposals of specific measures to be taken such as: cutting the number of members of parliament to 240; stripping them of immunity; establishing procedures for early dismissal; establishing 50 percent citizens' controlling quota in state institutions.

In short, a new system has to be established in which elected officials do what they are elected to do, and citizens are close enough to them to make sure they do it.

This seems a much less partisan approach than that which we saw this time last year in the Romanian demonstrations. The idea of a Constituent Assembly smacked to me of the French Revolution (hence the cartoon) but comes, I understand, more from the [Icelandic aftermath to its financial crash and utter loss of faith of the Icelandic people in its system of government](#). A Constitutional Council put a new constitution to a referendum at the end of the year - but it does not contain the radical proposals which Icelandic citizen groups suggested

The Bulgarian proposals seems to draw on the work of the Icelandic citizen associations but Bulgarians should be aware of the limitations of the Icelandic process - and of the basic fact that constitutional debate and new settlements cannot be rushed if the people are to trust the outcome. On Friday the leaders of the 3 parliamentary parties indicated they would refuse to form an interim government - which would force the President to dissolve parliament in about 2 weeks. One scenario is that a non-politician like Andrey Slabakov (leader of a citizen association and son of a famous actor) forms a citizen party to contest the new elections - as has happened in Italy (see below). He apparently, however, has strong connections with the existing power structure and could well disappoint.

In Italy Much scorn has been levelled against the populist comedian, Beppe Grillo, who apparently looks set to capture almost 20% of the vote in the Italian elections now underway. This [article looks](#)

[more sympathetically at the sort of candidates](#) who have been attracted to fight under his banner. One of the 200 or so discussants to the article posed three challenging questions -

I accept everything positive about the Grillo phenomenon: the need to scare the PD into action, the expression of positive anger. But I have three concerns, about which a Grillo supporter could perhaps reassure me:

- 1. new parties based on the charisma of an individual and with weak party structures are prone to infiltration. M5S (the Grillo party) has interesting policies and I am sure they are sincere. Leoluca Orlando's La Rete, 20 years ago, was a genuine grassroots anti-mafia party which, it is said, was later infiltrated by the mafia. How can M5S avoid this?*
- 2. if you are angry with corruption and mafia, why trust Grillo more than Rivoluzione Civile, whose leadership has a real track record of fighting crime and the mafia?*
- 3. are M5S supporters (and indeed Rivoluzione Civile or Monti supporters) genuinely indifferent between Berlusconi and Bersani (the PD leader)? If you think B and B are equally bad, then it makes sense to vote for neither. But the danger of Berlusconi winning 55% of the seats in Parliament with 30% vote, while PD+SEL get 29%, and maybe Grillo gets 25% fills me with fear. 25% would be a good result for M5S but would its supporters be really happy if this led to Berlusconi becoming President of the Republic and Alfano as Prime Minister?*

Wednesday, June 26, 2013

[Bulgarian protests get serious](#)



OK, time for some normal service! I left Bulgaria in mid-April - leaving my nice flat in the heart of the city for the summer months. After a couple of weeks in Bucharest, I then flew on May day to Koln where I have been undergoing some medical treatment. I hope shortly to get back to my mountain house in the Carpathians where the weather has apparently been as cold and wet as the rest of

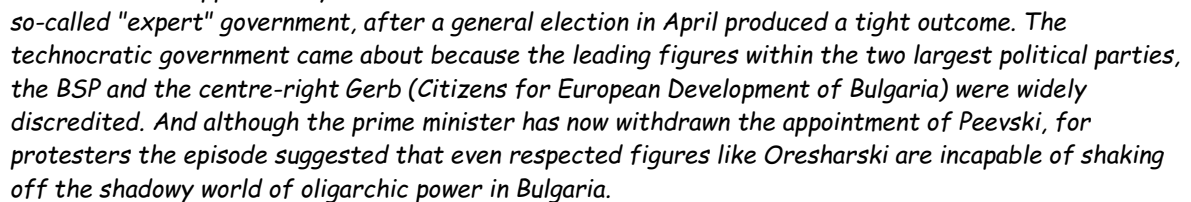
Europe. Pity my old villagers and their helpers who have been trying to get the first of the summer hay in!!

But, in the meantime, my Bulgarian friends have been taking to the streets yet again. I am grateful to [The Guardian for this coverage](#) -

In recent weeks the world has been transfixed by protests in [Turkey](#) and [Brazil](#). Fewer media outlets have reported on the anti-government protests in [Bulgaria](#), now well into their second week. But make no mistake about it: Bulgaria is undergoing a profound crisis of representation.

Every night for more than a week up to 10,000 people have taken to the streets of Sofia, initially protesting against the appointment on 14 June of the media oligarch [Delyan Peevski](#) as Bulgaria's "security tsar", the head of the State Agency for National Security (Dans), the Bulgarian CIA. Peevski, who is 32, comes from a well-connected family that owns Bulgaria's largest newspaper and television group (it controls 80% of print media in the country) and has no experience in the security sector. In 2007 he was sacked from his post as deputy minister and investigated for attempted blackmail. He is an MP for the ethnic Turkish party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which supports the prime minister Plamen Oresharski's governing coalition, led by the Bulgarian Socialist party (BSP). His

Dans is the agency responsible both for Bulgaria's internal and external security. Its role was elevated significantly in the wake of the [terrorist attack on Burgas airport in July 2012](#) (attributed to Hezbollah) which killed five Israeli tourists and their Bulgarian bus driver. This executive role has been strengthened even further recently after controversial amendments in the Dans legislation were signed giving the organisation responsibility for dealing with organised crime. Bulgarians are protesting against far-reaching and systematic corruption and the "capture" of the state by rent-seeking oligarchic networks. Oresharski was appointed by the BSP to head a



Varna perfectly illustrates why the current protests are largely non-party-political and anti-politics in tone: the definitive division in today's Bulgaria is no longer between right and left, but between the citizens and the mafia. This is a world where the guilty don't just go unpunished; they ascend to the highest citadels of power.

The irony here is not lost on Bulgarians. At the onset of the EU financial crisis in 2008, Bulgaria had one of the lowest levels of public debt in Europe at 15% of GDP. Its budget deficit was below 3%. And yet the government of Boyko Borissov embarked on a foolish programme of austerity measures, the logic of which was almost entirely predicated on demonstrating to Brussels what a good pupil Bulgaria now was. Reductions in public spending coupled with large increases in the price of electricity and other utilities brought people out on to the streets in February. But, like Turkey, what began as a protest against a specific appointment has quickly mutated into a general opposition to the government.

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parliamentary election, has sought to exploit this sentiment at every opportunity. Its leader, Volen Siderov, continues to stoke the flames of hatred against both the ethnic Turks and the Roma population.

A further destabilising element is the continued feuding between the leaders of Bulgaria's largest political parties. Last week, Borissov vowed to initiate a libel lawsuit against Sergei Stanishev, leader of the BSP and president of the Party of European Socialists, over claims by the latter that Borissov had a criminal record. The timing of all these developments could not be worse for Bulgaria as it comes under more and more scrutiny in the run-up to the June European council summit meeting. The protesters, meanwhile, cherish the attention. They want to re-enforce their message to Bulgaria's politicians: an end to vertiginous and voracious oligarchical power and the normalisation of Bulgarian politics.

Thursday, August 1, 2013

Forty Days and Nights in Sofia



One of my Bulgarian friends who has been involved in the protests in Sofia ([40 days so far](#)) sent me this morning [Ivan Krastev's brief \(and disappointingly uninformative\) article](#) on the current situation - one the few, however, which the British media have deemed worthy to print. Transitions Online has just published this [brief note from Boyko Vassilev](#) who is producer of the Panorama programme of Bulgarian Television and writes occasional pieces on Bulgaria such as [this one about the self-immolations](#) which were a feature of the earlier phase of the Bulgarian protests (in April). Hardly surprising that the EC technocrats have been sending broadly supportive messages to the protestors - nor that [old leftists have an ambivalent attitude](#) to protests which have the overtones of the wider "Occupy" movement but without the critique of capitalism the leftists

expect.

One Bulgarian Professor (in Germany) (who is a self-confessed member of [the Mont Pelerin society](#)) offers [this perspective on the events in Sofia](#)

The various conflicting attitudes to the protests are evident in [the discussion thread to the earlier article by Mariya Ivancheva](#) whose family was apparently part of the old Communist guard.

I'm sorry not to be present at the protests [some images of which are here](#) - and wish them well.

Tuesday, October 15, 2013

Through Tourist eyes - and taste buds

A hectic few days as my youngest daughter and her husband flew in for a long weekend. Sofia and Bulgaria were looking at their best - with the early morning mist, later sun and autumn foliage much in evidence as we visited the isolated redoubt of [Koprivishtica village](#) to the east of Sofia and, the next day, [Rilski Monastery](#) two hours' drive south of Sofia. Koprivshitsa is a captivating mountain town, unique with its cobblestone alleys, houses painted in bright colors with expansive



verandahs and picturesque eaves. During the

The April Uprising, which broke out in Koprivshitsa on April 20, 1876, gave voice to the desire and efforts of the Bulgarian people to win back its freedom after five centuries of Ottoman oppression. A lot of foreign journalists reported the events of the spring of 1876 and showed the world that there was a people on the Balkan Peninsula who had not lost their identity and were willing to strive for independence. Eventually, in 1878 Bulgaria won the freedom it had so long yearned for, at least partly helped by the publicity of the April Uprising and its subsequent brutal suppression.



verandahs and picturesque eaves. During the Ottoman rule, Koprivshitsa withstood many a raid- although it was reduced to ashes several times and its inhabitants were frequently robbed and driven away.

The wealthier townsfolk managed to "ransom" Koprivshitsa from the Turkish rulers and win some special privileges, thus keeping the [Bulgarian traditions and atmosphere of the town](#) intact.

In this way Koprivshitsa was able to preserve its freedom-loving, patriotic spirit and hand it down to its children. Quite a few Bulgarians who laid down their lives for the liberation of





We were not the only ones to visit Rila - one of my favourite ex-pat bloggers about the Sofia scene (now sadly back in the US) was there at the beginning of the month ([and also at Plovdiv](#))

[Rilski Monastery](#) is now a UNESCO site and, much as I enjoyed this time the exuberance of the recently repainted artwork, I felt that it was actually a bit over the top and inconsistent with the soul of the place. The screams of hordes of kids shattered what little calm the Saturday crowds allowed the monks in their warren of cells.

The only calm element were the postures of the 3 Japanese visitors who sketched the buildings.

In between times a bachanalian feast of Bulgarian dishes and wines was enjoyed - particularly at the two restaurants in my area, one of which is vegetarian and cooks superb black bread on the premises,

Saturday, October 26, 2013

[Aesthetics and economics](#)

Two sad departures - the lovely small Tabak café which occupied the back of the National Gallery building (the old Palace) and spread on to the quiet garden area leading up to the Russian Church was unceremoniously bundled out of its space few months back. By the Minister of Culture himself apparently - for failure to pay back rent due. I loved the challenge the cafe represented to political correctness - and also the serenity of the garden section with its views of various statues.



And the large gallery space which used to offer paintings, ceramics and wine from the Katarzsyna estate in Ivan Denklogu st just down from Vitosha which also offered musical performances a couple of times each week in its downstairs basement has also disappeared - now being made over I suspect into a luxury shoe shop.

Not good for Sofia's European City of Culture 2019 bid! Although the pavements (the worst of any European capital) are now being repaired!!

Times have been bad for Sofia's small galleries for the past few years - and still don't show any sign of looking up. I talk to their owners - one of whom told me that she recoups very little of the 1,000



euros a month which her small space costs her - in rental, facilities and help. It is a labour of love - and I look forward to being amongst the participants of tonight's event which celebrates her first year. I've bought three things from that particular gallery so far - and am pleased that pride of place in the exhibition which marks the first anniversary are aquarelles from a 90 year-old! And it's good to see that the older painters still alive are honoured by several of the smaller galleries.....

ofia's atmosphere was nicely captured for me yesterday when I was leaving another gallery (having bought the Kostadinov "lady in red" which heads the last post). A man with a painting under his arm was walking past and paused to let us examine it. "Do you like it?" he asked after he told me it was a Trichkov (a painter I have been trying to buy) and then walked off.....

Monday, October 28, 2013

[Off the Bulgarian beaten track](#)

There are two parts of picturesque Bulgaria which are off- the beaten track - the south-east borderland (with Greece and Turkey) and the entire stretch of the Danube in the north. A small but fascinating book on the Danube Riverside which I picked up in a Sofia store had a substantial section on the town of [Svishtov](#) (birthplace of artists Nikolae Tanev, Alexander Bozhinov and Nikolae Parvevitch) persuaded me to take a detour for it - despite the bank of fog which was darkening the otherwise cloudless skies over northern Bulgaria.



It was a worthwhile journey - through small desolated settlements and rolling hills until I reached a town which has seen much better days. In its heyday it was a bustling city which history (and shifting transport patterns) have left isolated.

Having viewed a few of the old houses, I took the road for Russe and, a few kilometres out of Svishtov, hit an amazing sight - what appeared to be a building site was in fact the reconstruction of the old Roman camp of Novae and I was lucky enough to meet up with the Polish archaeologist who had been working the site for 35 years!

There is a nice little [guide here about visiting the site](#) which gives an excellent sense of the whole area. And I learned that this was the very site from which the Russians launched the campaign in July 1877 which brought Bulgaria independence from the Ottoman Empire - I had earlier passed through one of the villages which houses a grand house which was the Russian HQ. Several hundred Russian soldiers lost their life here.....

The subsequent drive to Russe was very beautiful - with the autumn leaves in their most glorious foliage.

Danube Divides



The Danube may be a busy river but it has also acted as a barrier between Bulgaria and Romania who have had, over the years, a rather strained relationship - not helped by the open conflict during the two Balkan Wars a hundred years ago and the absorption by Romania in 1918 for 22 years of a significant section of Bulgarian territory on the southern banks of the Danube (the Dobrogea area of the North-East).

Although I have visited the city of Dobrich in the heart of that area - and Balcik on the Black Sea which was a famous art colony then for the Bucharest glitterati, I have not yet managed the various settlements which scatter along the eastern Danube banks particularly Silistra (this is one of the paintings in my collection of that city - by one Hristo Danev from 1910)

I was therefore delighted to come across just now a post from a Romanian blogger I admire about [Tutrakan and the museum and monument there](#) which mark the battles; the role played by such outsiders as the Germans; and the eventual liberation of the area in 1940. What I particularly appreciated about the post (apart from the photographs and history) was the recognition of the dubious nature of the encroachment in the first place - the author admitting that the visit made him appreciate that this was a bit of Romanian imperialism

Although a lot of Romanians make the journey by road to Varna in the summer, there is, it seems to me, still little love lost between the nations. I do occasionally worry about my Romanian numberplates here!!

I was looking these days at some text about the characteristics of Bulgarians and those who are their neighbours. I was told (by When Cultures Collide) that -

Bulgarians differ considerably from other Slavs in their values and communication style, probably because of their origins. In general they are cooler and more pragmatic than many Slavs, particularly when compared with Serbs. Quiet and soberness are valued; you will see little of the hotheaded discussion or noisy public disputes that are only too common in Belgrade. They do, however, share with other Slavs a widespread feeling of pessimism about national helplessness. In general, Bulgarian values tend to be rural, with homespun virtues, as one might expect from people living in a predominantly agricultural society. Basic values are disciplined/sober; pragmatic/cautious; persistent/stubborn; good organizers; industrious/determined; steady/suspicious but tolerant of foreigners; inventive; highly literate/thorough

Before giving full expression to their feelings or opinions, Bulgarians engage in a series of preliminary encounters, during which they sound out and size up (albeit in a friendly manner) their conversation partners. During this period they are decidedly less flowery or rhetorical in their speech than the Yugoslavs, Romanians or Hungarians. At this stage, it is very difficult to extract opinions or eventual

attitudes from them. When this exploratory period has passed, Bulgarians open up to display a modicum of quiet charm and make their requests in a circuitous manner, avoiding confrontation whenever they can. They enjoy conversation—an art for them—but are less prone to exaggeration than South Slavs or other Mediterranean people.

And here's an interesting report which makes the case for a [different sort of leadership](#) than that which the modern (and post-modern) world has inflicted on us.

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

[Kruchma and chibouk](#)

I have to confess to a taste for cigars - indulged in private. About one a day. Even worse, I admire the remnants of the tobacco culture one finds here in Bulgaria - the brazenness with which the owners of the tiny shops which line the narrow streets of Sofia city centre squat on their doorsteps and smoke the weed and drink their coffee.

I have become an avid collector of [the aquarelles of Grigor Naidenov](#) who celebrated the café culture here of the inter-war and post-war years.

[Balkan smoke - tobacco and the making of modern Bulgaria](#) paints a fascinating picture of the role of tobacco in the social, economic and political life of modern Bulgaria. It's by [Mary Neuburger](#)



It was not until the nineteenth century that Bulgarians began to enter the Muslim coffeehouse, where they conducted commerce and local administration, read newspapers, and engaged in debate. It was then that they learned to smoke, as they came of age politically and culturally, and as their national movement gained momentum. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, smoking, like the tobacco industry itself, drove social change, accompanying and even propelling a certain "coming of age" for social groups who joined the ranks of passionate smokers.

As Bulgarians entered the coffeehouse at home, they also began to frequent European cafes and discover themselves as "Bulgarians" abroad, amidst the intellectual ferment of Paris, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. Soon Bulgarians began to establish coffeehouses at home that took on increasingly European characteristics, mainly aesthetically. For example, the traditional hookah was replaced by the newly minted cigarette. Coffeehouses became places of intellectual and cultural activity, and tobacco became a muse for generations of the Bulgarian elite. In the interwar period, in particular, the coffeehouse was at the heart of intellectual life, though other kinds of smoke-filled venues mushroomed in the Bulgarian capital and elsewhere in Bulgaria.

Smoking became the quintessential modern habit, a necessary accoutrement for the modern man and eventually woman, in both the sober coffeehouse and the drunken tavern. Women and youth slowly entered this world of public smoking in the course of twentieth century, a fact that impelled anti-smoking impulses (however meagre).

In some respects this is a familiar story, with obvious global parallels, yet the Bulgarian context continually reveals its own particular nuances. In pre-1945 Bulgaria, for example, anti-smoking impulses flowed from two rather disparate sources, American (and Bulgarian convert) Protestants and the communist left. Both had a radical vision for "moral uplift" and social reform and utopian visions of the future. But both were also, in a sense, foreign, and so faced local and official hostility in the period before 1945. Most Bulgarians simply did not want to give up their new found pleasures, and the state was an important beneficiary of tobacco industry revenues and consumption taxes.

In the post World War II period, the dramatic change to a communist form of government brought an entirely new set of practical and theoretical quandaries. The Bulgarian tobacco industry took off, producing ever greater numbers of increasingly luxurious cigarettes for the enormous "captive" Soviet and Bloc market.

There was also a veritable explosion of state built and run restaurants, cafes, hotels and sea-side resorts in the later decades of period, as the state sought legitimacy by providing the "good life" to its workers. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, communist state-directed abstinence efforts emerged, along with heightened concerns over the growing numbers of smoking women and youth. The Bulgarian communists continually connected smoking to "western" moral profligacy and "remnants" of a capitalist past, as well as "Oriental" degeneracy—or Bulgaria's backwards, Ottoman past. Yet the state continued to provide cheap cigarettes and places to smoke them as never before. Bulgarian smoking rates skyrocketed under communism and the period generated a society of smokers for whom the voice of abstinence was just another form of state propaganda.

A reference in the text to the famous Bulgarian writer Ivan Vazov's [Under the Yoke](#) has encouraged me to read this classic novel about life under the Ottomans in the late 19th century.

NB Kruchma was a village tavern where long pipes (Chibouks) were smoked before being replaced by cigarettes. The same bakal (shop) in villages would be a kafene during the day and kruchma in the evening - with rakia replacing the coffee and cigarettes the chibouks of an earlier age.

Bulgarian Whites

Perhaps understandably, I failed to mention the annual 2 day Bulgarian wine fair I attended 2 weekends ago here in Sofia.

It was hard work - and required a rest afterwards! For 10 euros I had a 2-day pass and more than 200 wines to taste.

I did my best on the Saturday - the white and rose day - but found red Sunday a bit of a slog - with my pallet and tongue fairly quickly getting badly coated!

For some reason, I decided to score the wines out of 6.0 and the white wines I appreciated came out as follows -

- Lovica - Chardonnay (6 levs!) 4.5 out of 6.0
- LVK - Colombard (5 levs! and 4.5 score) and Sauvignon Blanc (SB)



- Black Sea Gold - Muscat El Mar (6 levs) - **find of the day!** Salty Hills Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc (15 levs) - one of the best (Silver medal)
- Minkov - Rheinriesling
- Katarzyna - SB (4.2)
- Marvin - Viognier and Chardonnay and Viognier - both 4.5s in my scoring
- Villa Yustina - Blanc Cuvee (8 levs)
- Zagreus - white Mavrud - 4.5 on my scoring
- Medi Valley - Chardonnay Incanto **(4.9!!) 18 levs** and Chardonnay and Viognier
- No Man's Land 600 SB 12 levs
- Kapatovo - Chardonnay and Viognier 4.5 (18 levs)

On Sunday, the only wine which impressed me was [the Ethno range of wines](#). They are from [the Sungurlare valley](#) near Burgas on the Black Sea and the Chardonnay I am now drinking (3 euros) got a silver medal (in the 2013 "Chardonnays of the World" somewhere). How do they do it??

Tomorrow I will try to find some specimens of all these wines in [the CaseVino chain](#) - the Bulgarian version of Oddbins - and subject them in the next week to some tough tasting and testing. No rest for the conscientious!!

The photo is of the wine museum in Sungurlare village - the wine area very near Burgas

Sunday, January 26, 2014

[Banned artists in Bulgaria](#)



I visited three exhibitions last week here in Sofia as the snow threatened and then arrived at the weekend - first at the [National Art Academy](#) which was showing some of their collection accompanied by a superb 200 page catalogue called Painting Collection (1896-1940) (Museum Collection of the National Academy of Art); then the excellent City Gallery which was showing a rather disappointing [exhibition of Sirak Skitnik](#); and finally, the refurbished [National Gallery](#) which is at last showing beautiful work from its collection - at least on the second floor (and if you ignore the temporary exhibition of an artist who doesn't even figure in the updated version of my booklet on [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#)).

This updated version (not yet online) includes the details of another 40 artists I've been able to add over the past year - as well as the links I discovered today to two of the books in my extensive collection of books on Bulgarian painters - the terrific production on the [Art Collection of the National Bank of Bulgaria](#) and also a link to an old book I found a year or so ago in the antique bookshops here - [Socialist construction in the work of](#)

[Bulgarian artists](#) (Sofia 1954). This gives reproductions of more than 30 typical paintings of the period - glorifying the life of the worker.

I find it remarkable how little reference I find - particularly in the art books here - to the problems artists experienced in Bulgaria both in the immediate aftermath of [the communist takeover in September 1944](#) or in the two decades which followed. Famous artists such as Boris Denev and Nicolae Boiadjiev suffered from bans.



And I stumbled today on two more examples - [Konstantin Shtarkelov](#) (1881-1961) was the most famous of a clutch of outstanding Bulgarian watercolour painters (including Pavel [Francalijski](#); Yordan Geshev and Kriskaretz). Shtarkelov came from a very poor family and lived in poverty in Odessa and Moscow as a youth and met the key Russian artists of the time before returning in 1909 to Bulgaria. He did portraits but preferred to draw landscapes from Rila and Pirin Mountains, Sofia and Tarnovo regions (see pp 39-42 of the Bulgarian Bank book for 4 examples). He was also a war artist in 1912-1913 and 1917. His works were exhibited in Bulgaria, the Czech

Republic, Venice, Germany and Hungary.

But, after September 9 1944, his work was banned and forgotten because of "his ties with the Palace". They call him the "official artist of the bourgeois regime and royal favorite " ... **Konstantin Shtarkelov** was expelled from the artists' union and spent five months in the Central Prison before living a life of destitution. According to an [extensive article I found about him on the Artprice website](#) he did eventually manage to hold a much visited exhibition of his works in 1960. It attracted mixed reviews and he died less than a year later.

I was also very pleased to come across today [this little story about Vasil Barakov](#) (1902-1991) - one of the first Bulgarian artists to show industrial landscapes in 1948-1949 a group of artists, including Vasil Barakovo, Zlatyu Boyadziev (one of Bulgaria's best) and Zdravko Alexandrov were sent to paint three months in Romania, mainly in the area of Baia Mare (Transylvania) and around Ploesti. Barakov returned to Bulgaria with many landscapes, portraits and sketches, which captures features of Romania. In early 1949 the group made a joint exhibition. Only three days later it unexpectedly closed. Critics accuse the authors of formalism. They do not reflect reality in brotherly Romania.

"My father - says son of Vasil Barakov - Dr. Miroslav Barakov - was mortified. He knew that the paintings



were good - as did his colleagues but did not show his external feelings, did not react emotionally. But, after these serious charges in those dangerous and difficult years, something snapped in him and he almost ceased to paint... well, from time to time, he did a still life but focused instead on film posters, book design. Often our salary saved my mother a teacher of mathematics. This went on for 10-12 years. "In 1967, however, the ice around the great master of the brush crushed. He was awarded the title of Honored Artist. In 1973, the maestro made a commemorative exhibition in gallery "Rakovski" 125 in the capital. When he went in the morning in the exhibition hall, the artist finds there the other great master of the brush - Ilia Petrov.

Bulgaria has had [a museum of socialism](#) for a year or so which I've not so far been tempted to visit. But [this rather superficial assessment](#) suggests that I should give it the once-over. Certainly "leftists" such as Ilyia Beshkov and Marko Behar had no problems flourishing in the new regime but quite a few others suffered greatly....

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Bulgarian Hopes



I was ashamed to find myself responding cynically at the weekend to Bulgarian friends who had expressed surprise at my lack of recent comment on the continuing Bulgarian protests and standoff. They've lasted a year - and had the President suggesting last week making voting compulsory. "No protest movement ever achieves anything" I announced in worldly tones.

"Any momentary progress is immediately clawed back - or numerous distracting stratagems (like war) brought into play" I might have added.

Shame on me! To forget and thus to denigrate the power of the working class efforts of the 20th century - or those of present-day Chinese - or of the social movements of the last quarter of the 20th century in Latin America (against fascist murderers and corporate America) - let alone the mass protests in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany which led to the breaching of the Wall; and the "hopes of spring" in North Africa in recent years.

Of course it always seems to be a question of one step forward - and three back. But since when did we expect life to be easy?

The Feudal class is always with us - rubbing our noses in it.....looking greedily for opportunities for exploitation. Here we are, 25 years after the Fall of the Wall - and any serious retrospective would have to make it a disastrous call. People's lives have been seriously blighted - and moral corruption seeps through everyone's veins. Little wonder that more than half of the population in all the countries of central and Eastern Europe regrets what was let go....

Gene Sharp has been one of the most quoted champions of the change process (after, that is, people like Gandhi; Martin Luther King; and Saul Alinsky.

The American Sharp has come late to stardom - see the latest version of his [From Dictatorship to Democracy](#) His work has clearly been useful to the activists of the various Occupy movements globally.

But can we really separate process from content? A lot of foreign cash has actually gone into supporting these "revolutions" and the hand of corporate power is clearly evident in the agenda of privatising public resources which is now being pushed by the European Commission as part of [a wider and scandalous WTO effort](#).

[The Violence of Non-violence](#) is an article which suggests that this is an inevitable consequence of Sharp-like emphasis on process. And this is certainly borne out by my own experience 20 years ago in Romania when I took part in several weekend schools for young politicians. The young Americans leading these courses put all the emphasis on developing electoral skills, on marketing - and absolutely none on policy issues.

The Bulgarian protests will be [a year old next week](#). They started over anger at the hiking of electricity prices and led quickly to the collapse of the Government but were fuelled by disgust over the behaviour of the political class as a whole. In the past few months, students and academic staff seemed to take a more prominent role in these protests and I don't know how much the thinking has changed in the past year. A year ago I wrote that -

On the political side, demands have gone even further to seek an overhaul of the political system in Bulgaria. They have made clear that the system has to be changed in such a way that when the next party comes to power, it can no longer behave the way all governments in Bulgaria have for the past 24 years. There have to be checks on political power and mechanisms to prevent collusion between politicians, private economic interests and organised crime.

Protesters are currently calling for a Constituent Assembly to be formed to change the constitution and develop mechanisms of direct involvement of citizens in government matters.

There have been proposals of specific measures to be taken such as: cutting the number of members of parliament to 240; stripping them of immunity; establishing procedures for early dismissal; establishing 50 percent citizens' controlling quota in state institutions.

In short, a new system has to be established in which elected officials do what they are elected to do, and citizens are close enough to them to make sure they do it.

The idea of a Constituent Assembly smacked to me of the French Revolution but comes, I understand, more from [the Icelandic aftermath to its financial crash and utter loss of faith of the Icelandic people in its system of government](#). A Constitutional Council put a new constitution to a referendum at the end of the year - but it does not contain the radical proposals which Icelandic citizen groups suggested. The Bulgarian proposals seems to draw on the work of the Icelandic citizen associations but Bulgarians should be aware of [the limitations of the Icelandic process](#) - and of the basic fact that constitutional debate and new settlements cannot be rushed if the people are to have any trust in the outcome.

Ivan Daraktchiev is the brains behind [the Zaedno website](#) (it means "Together" in Bulgarian) which gives one angle on the issues from someone who is Bulgarian but has spent most of his recent life in Belgium. He has just uploaded a key paper - [The Revolution within Democracy](#) - onto the [English part of the Zaedno website](#) and a comprehensive statement of the requirements of a radically different

type of constitutional settlement can be found on page 6. To many it will seem utopian - and I hope to do it justice in a future post.

Friday, February 14, 2014

A special day - for wine!

On the 14th of February Bulgarians celebrate the day of St. Trifon Zarezan. The roots of this holiday are hidden in the far distant past and probably is related to the Thracian god of the wine - Dionysius. The pagan customs messed with the Orthodox traditions and people invented an amusing legend about Trifon Zarezan.

He was a common wine-grower. One day he went to his vineyard to cut the vine outgrowths. He met his sister Virgin Mary and joked with her for that she had an illegitimate child. She decided to punish him. Virgin Mary went to Trifon's wife and told her that Trifon had cut his nose. His wife rushed towards the vineyard to help hers husband but she saw he is fine. The woman told him what happened and Trifon started laughing. He said that this is impossible, but when he waved with a hand he really cut his nose with the pruning-knife. This accident gave him his nickname - "Zarezan" which means "truncated". Real St. Trifon died as a martyr during the roman persecution over the Christians. But people didn't want to relate his name with sadness and pain, so they crowned him with the nimbus of the wine and rejoicing.



More seriously, wine is [one of the few bright spots in the Bulgarian economy and society.](#)

"Russia is again Bulgaria's biggest wine market. We used to sell the largest quantities of Bulgarian wine on this market in the past. The good news is that Bulgaria has regained its market in the average and the high price segment there. The same thing refers to the Polish and the Czech market. We managed to step back on these markets and sell successfully our produce.

In the past, one-third of the wine market in Poland consisted of Bulgarian wines. Bulgaria used to sell more wine there than Italy, France and Spain altogether. Currently we are slowly regaining our position there. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian wine is slowly shifting from the low price segment to the medium and the high ones."

A similar trend exists on other traditional markets in Western Europe. Bulgaria sells less, but more expensive wines there. The industry has the chance to penetrate large and new markets such as China and India. The wine export to China has been constantly on the rise over the past years. Bulgaria also attempts at positioning its wines in the USA, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, Vietnam and China, within the frameworks of the EU programme for promotion of wines in third countries.

The local wine sorts were neglected over the past decades when the curiosity of the Bulgarian producers and consumers towards foreign sorts such as Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Melbeek, etc, was huge. Now the country has the chance to find its niche in the world wine market with traditional vine sorts.

Bulgaria currently plants new plots with local vines such as Mavrud, Broad-leaf Melnik Vine, Pamid, and Rubin and we are to see the results in the nearest future, says Radoslav Radev.

2013 was exceptionally favorable to Bulgarian wine-making. The grape yield was very rich and of an extremely high quality. A record-high quantity of wine (around 200 million liters) is expected to be produced this year as compared to 127 million liters produced in 2012.

The painting is one in my collection - Tihorov from Veliko Tarnovo.

Sunday, February 16, 2014

Bulgarian populism and the protests



Globalism has failed. Monetarism has failed. The liberal politics of "less government, the market has the final say" has failed. The worldwide financial crisis, caused by the US, is a clear sign of this. Market fundamentalism, transformed into a religion by the financial and political establishment of the US, has suffered an abysmal defeat.... We say no to the world's speculative capital, no to supranational corporations, which destroy market economies, no to Wall Street, and we say yes to more common sense, balance, and equity

What could be more sensible than that? And yet the words are taken from the right-wing Bulgarian Ataka party's 2013 manifesto. I found them a few days ago in an excellent overview of Bulgarian populism on [Anna Krasteva's blog](#). The article, written, in English, by a Bulgarian academic who lives in Sofia, continues

The populist rage is targeted mostly at international capital, which "drains" the national wealth: Ataka have estimated that 28 billion 257 million leva have been diverted from the pockets of Bulgarian tax payers into the treasuries of foreign companies selling food, clothes, electricity, banking services etc. "All institutions, all ministries, the fields of culture, healthcare, and education altogether receive 10 billion leva less than the foreign colonizers!" (Ataka 2013, 8).

Anti-Europeanism is the other topic which attracts the critical pathos of populist negation.

It strikes out in three directions.

- *The first one concerns the accusations of neo-colonialism: the EU "is becoming a new Soviet Union, functioning by force and against the constitution" (Ataka 2013). The full version of the program bears the arrogant title Siderov's Plan against the Colonial Yoke; the text begins with the story of "how we were enslaved after the fall of the Berlin Wall".*

- *The second criticism is institutional and is leveled at Europe's institutional structure: "the fake figure of EU president has been imposed, which contradicts both national and international law"; this claim also targets the consequences of Bulgaria's political strategy: "The Euro Pact invalidates the Parliament and the government, the elections, and democracy at large."*
- *The third direction has to do with Europeanization as a form of globalization: "The Euro Pact reinforces the power of the supranational and corporate oligarchy". All of these criticisms converge in a cluster whose core conveys the message, "the EU is a threat to the national identity, sovereignty, and dignity": "Bulgaria is threatened with a loss of identity and with extinction"; "Bulgaria is losing its sovereignty".*

Of course, the Ataka style is highly aggressive and intolerant - but I see no reason to fault this sort of the discourse which you will find in all current European "populist" parties. The romantic pull of the village and its traditions does seem stronger in Bulgaria than (say) in Romania - and the Romanian peasantry (unlike the Bulgarian) does seem to retain its loyalty to socialist/communist elements of political organisation.....

In [a long post](#) just a couple of weeks ago, the same author has a rare and useful analysis of the protests which have now lasted here in Bulgaria for one year now.

I would identify three waves and three types of protests:

- *the anti-monopoly protests of winter/spring 2013;*
- *the anti-oligarchy protests of summer 2013;*
- *the anti-government student protests of autumn 2013.*

The political geography of the winter protests was decentralized. Sofia did not win first place, but neither did it vie for it. I have called those protests 'Varna Spring' because the protesters in Varna outnumbered those in Sofia, as well as because their outrage was well-targeted - against the mayor and a business group. Not against business in general, but against criminal groups suffocating business; not against the elite in general, but against a mayor who had brought the city to its knees before behind-the-scenes interests; not against government in general, but against that which was devouring Varna's Sea Garden and stifling the vitality and enterprising spirit of Bulgaria's seaside capital (Krasteva 2013c).

Just days after the winter protests, the government of Boyko Borisov resigned although the protesters had not demanded - nor even thought of demanding - its resignation. After six months of protests against the Oresharski government, protesters were still demanding its resignation but the government, Parliament, and even the opposition were now saying that the incumbents were likely to remain in power for some time to come. The political effect of the winter and the post-winter protests was opposite, but they were similar in that, paradoxically, both led to the opposite of the desired results. In terms of duration, the protest year 2013 is unprecedented in Bulgarian democratic history.

We remember from history how a trivial occasion - an African American woman's refusal to surrender her seat to a white man - led to the abolition of racial segregation and a profound transformation of American society. The Bulgarian protests also started from a concrete occasion - the exorbitant electricity bills and the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a controversial media mogul, as chief of the State Agency for National Security (DANS) - but the protest wave outlived the occasion (Peevski did not remain in office for more than a day), rightly interpreting it not as an exception but as an inevitable consequence of the whole political system which became the target of its outrage.

This is a most useful update of a rather [more general 2008 article on Bulgarian populism](#) entitled Radical Demophilia by Conservative MEP Svetoslav Malinov and should be put in the wider context

of the collection of articles I referred to a few days ago on European populism, the general tone of the articles being (typically) elitist and disapproving.

What, I have to wonder, is wrong with being in tune with popular opinion these days?????

The painting is one of the favourite Socialist Realist ones I have in my collection. Of partisans, it gives a sense of the village against the enemy.....

Ilia Petrov

Had a great privilege yesterday - to visit the house and studio of Ilia Petrov (1903-1975) - one of the great Bulgarian artists. According to the text I have, he -

worked in the style of the artists of the 17th century, combining silvery tones of Velazquez, cold pink flesh of Rubens and created powerful female portraits and nudes - with sophisticated shades of greenish and bluish, working with sophisticated techniques so that even today, 50 years after



acquainted with European traditions. In the late 1930s, disturbed by fascism, he did a series of paintings on The War in Spain. 1941-1967 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy. 1961 visited India

Art teacher (1928 - 1940) From 1940 lecturer, from 1957 to 1968 - professor of painting at the Art Academy, Sofia, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts (1957-1962) and Rector (1965- 1968. The Art School in Sofia bears his name.

After the communist takeover in September 1944, he took an active part in the management of the Union of Bulgarian Artists and was its Secretary-General (1949-1951 and 1957-1959) and participated in the work of "Monument to the



their creation, his paintings look as if they are still not dry. His paintings are almost impossible to reproduce.

He was born in Razgrad; and studied at Sofia Art Academy 1921-26 - latterly under Prof. Nikola Marinov. He went on to specialize in Munich and gave an exhibition there in 1928. On his way back to Bulgaria he did an extended tour of German cities, France, Austria and Italy to become



Soviet Army" in Sofia.

He also did quite a few works of historical revolutionary themes : "Guerrillas in action", "Before the shooting ", " Partisan Song", " The Messenger " but his true virtuosity seen in naked bodies , where he remains one of Bulgaria's greatest artists. A young student did this copy of a famous self-portrait he did which hangs in the National Gallery hereShades of Lucian Freud!

Left a tremendous amount of paintings - portrait sketches, animals - some of which, as I can testify, are still to be displayed in public.

It was, in fact, the sketches that most interested me - and I emerged from the meeting with his nephew, with about 10 of them as well as the painting!

Georgi Markov - a forgotten writer



What do Europeans think when they think of Bulgaria? Until last year's fuss about immigrant workers, the typical response would probably have been a scratch of the head and a reference to the Black Sea coast. A minute's more thought by older respondents might produce a reference to the poisoned umbrella which killed a Bulgarian dissident in London in the 1970s.

Georgi Markov was a famous writer assassinated on a London street by the Bulgarian secret services - although the precise details are still not known.

A well-known sculptor, Spartak Dermedjiev, is someone who has tried to keep Markov's memory alive - initially with an exhibition and, earlier this month, by marking Markov's birthday with a small monument in a square in central Sofia. Coincidentally The Nation journal published a piece about the man -

When Georgi Markov left Bulgaria in 1969, at the age of 40, he was one of the country's most lionized writers, the darling of readers and, until that point, party officials. By all accounts, his success was astounding. He was a chemical engineer by education and worked in various factories in his youth, writing only in his spare time; yet his second novel, "Men", was named novel of the year by the Bulgarian Writers' Union in 1962. Markov was immediately granted full membership in the organization, an unprecedented honor at that time. The award flung open all of the important doors. "Men" was quickly adapted into a movie, a play and a radio drama, and translations of the novel appeared throughout the Eastern bloc. Markov's subsequent books were also praised by critics and his plays staged in major theaters in Sofia and across the country. He was appointed to a cushy editorial position at Narodna Mladezh, one of the most prestigious Bulgarian publishing houses. And that, in turn, brought him more rewards and privileges.

He became increasingly critical of the regime and eventually failed to return from a foreign visit - landing up in London where he broadcast for the BBC and Radio Free Europe. His broadcasts (often about aspects of Bulgaria) were collected in a book called *In Absentia* which (sadly) I cannot find online. The article recounts what is known about the role of the Russian KGB and its Bulgarian

equivalent in the eventual assassination of the writer in 1978 – but also makes some comments about the lack of proper recognition today of the man.

Last year, a sociological study spearheaded by the Hannah Arendt Center in Sofia examined young Bulgarians' knowledge of totalitarianism in Europe and at home. The respondents were between the ages of 15 and 35, and the results were striking: 79 percent hadn't heard of the Gulag; 67 percent hadn't heard of the Iron Curtain; 51 percent didn't know the reason for Markov's death; and 89 percent had no knowledge of the book In Absentia Reports. The Bulgarian crisis of historical memory is hardly peculiar to young people, especially when it comes to Markov's literary works. Most adults are familiar with his name today, but only in the context of his murder. Few have read his essays or novels, and only the biggest bookstores in Sofia stock a book or two of his by chance. It is much easier to find a copy of the memoirs of the dictator Todor Zhivkov than, for example, Markov's excellent novellas "The Portrait of My Double" and "The Women of Warsaw."

His work is not taught in schools.... The Bulgarian who should have taken the same position in his nation's literature and political history as Brodsky in Russia, Havel in the Czech Republic and Milosz in Poland has been relegated to the dustbin of memory. After his murder abroad, Markov was killed a second time, this time in his home country.



Well at least there is one person, [Spartak Dermedjiev](#), whose work keeps his memory alive!

Wednesday, May 14, 2014

Bulgaria - it's our oil!

I may be in the (very misty) Carpathian mountains at the moment but have to keep an eye on the other parts of the Balkan configuration....My German contacts tells me that Bulgaria's close energy ties to Russia are causing concern among European officials



They worry Moscow will use Sofia as a beachhead for its interests and drive a wedge between EU member states.....Bulgaria is an easy target for the Kremlin because the country is almost entirely dependent on energy imports from Russia to survive. One third of its economic output is either directly or indirectly controlled by Moscow, the German reports indicate. Bulgaria's governing coalition -- of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms party, which represents the country's Turkish minority -- is considered closely aligned with Moscow. It includes an illustrious group of former Communist Party members, intelligence service workers and Bulgarian oligarchs who do business with Russian President Vladimir Putin's minions.

One of the country's most influential business magnates is banker Tzvetan Vassilev -- whose KTB bank handles much of the money flowing from Moscow into state-controlled Bulgarian industry, particularly the energy sector.

Last week, various media reported the contents of a secret letter from Russian energy giant Gazprom to the Economics Ministry in Sofia. In the letter, the Russian state-owned company allegedly provided ministry officials with draft formulations for a law relating to the South Stream pipeline, a project that will carry Russian gas through Bulgaria to Austria. Much to the chagrin of the European Commission, the multibillion euro project is being led by Gazprom.

The government in Sofia has snubbed Brussels with the draft law because it redefines the Bulgarian part of the pipeline as a simple "gas grid interconnection" rather than a full-fledged pipeline in an effort to circumvent EU competition regulations..... The European Commission has been highly critical of the South Stream project, noting among other things that it violates EU energy market rules -- anti-monopoly regulations passed in 2009 aim to prevent producers from owning pipelines. In another alleged violation of EU policy, Bulgaria is also moving to exclude third-party suppliers from using the pipeline. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, a fellow Social Democrat, is kept fully abreast of the Kremlin's strategy by his staff. He met this month with Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev, an independent politician who is fighting openly with his government because he wants to keep Bulgaria on a course toward the West. Plevneliev warned of dangerous developments across the entire region. He fears Putin could destabilize Bulgaria and the Balkans and seek to bring it under its sphere of influence. Gerhard Schröder is currently employed by a Gazprom subsidiary and made a trip to Sofia this week to provide support for the Bulgarian Socialists in the European election.

Sunday, July 27, 2014

Dealing with Sofia's Past

The day started early with the urgent chimes of the venerable Church [Cyril and Methodius and the 5 disciples](#) - whose birthday it apparently was.

I'm not normally in Sofia in summer - although the currents around the Vitosha mountain and the trees in its streets and courtyards do offer relief from the summer heat which has not been as evident as usual. Lots of rain - indeed severe hailstones at the beginning of the month. Cars were banged shapeless.

The flat I've been renting (from December 2012) is a West-facing attic flat in a very central (Khan Krum St) classic 1922 building - with a leafy courtyard, gratefully populated by cats who are well looked after by the city's older citizens.

The Sofia City Gallery has now introduced entry charges - but at such a reasonable level I can forgive them. 1 euro for adults - 2 euros for a family ticket - and free for senior citizens. So I had no problems parting with 5 euros for a book about "[unknown artists from one picture](#)" which focuses on a famous 1952 painting by one Asen Vasiliev of some 20 Bulgarian painters examining and discussing a painting. The magisterial figure of Vladimir Dimitrova - known as "the Master" - dominates the group and the book identifies each of the painters, sketches their lives and gives an example of their work.

The book is exceptional, however, in being the first I know to detail (in English) the circumstances of the cultural crackdown in the late 1940s on Bulgarian painters. But it does so in the strange elliptical fashion I have begun to recognise as the true Balkan way.....

I know something about the events - and the artists affected.....starting in the early (but vicious) days of the September 1944 communist takeover with the unexplained death in prison of graphic artist Raiko Aleksiev and soon affecting such famous artists as Boris Denev, Nikola Boadjiev and (royal aquarellist) Constantin Shtarkelov - none of whom figure in the book. Instead the text focuses on Alexander Zhendov, a good communist satirist who strongly objected to the wooden bureaucrats who were foisted to lead the cultural struggle against modernism.....Other good communists such as the great Ilyia Beshkov are simply not mentioned.....

The nepotic (or "Balkan") nature of the editorial process is still evident in many of the new art books produced here.....eg the large one celebrating 120 years of art [produced by the Bulgarian Union of Artists](#) a couple of years ago. The images are great but the text tells us little beyond of the dates of the various artistic Associations, some of the names of the key artists and vague hints of struggles and conflicts.....And some curious omissions - perhaps these were the more independent-minded artists who weren't "belongers"?

I had hoped to see the exhibition in the Vaska Emanouilova Gallery - a largely unknown branch of the Sofia City Gallery in a lovely garden beside Boulevard Dondukova. It was supposed to be open - but wasn't. Coincidentally, the Loran Gallery was showing paintings of Shtarkelov and Boadjiev and will mark September 9 1944 with an exhibition of banned artists.

Saturday, March 22, 2014

[Some recommendations for those visiting Sofia](#)

This has become the time of the year when my mind turns to the Carpathian house. Most of the last 7 winters have been spent here in Sofia (with forays to the small Bucharest flat and some sad weeks in a Belgrade winter) and I have been particularly happy with the latest attic flat (right in the old quarter, off Patriarch Eftemi Boulevard) with the 1927 date carved in the stone entrance.



It has the sort of stairhead I imagine Ilyia Beshkov using for one of his wry sketches..... and my small flat (which I've been renting for 16 months) has all the original wooden features and stained glass as well as a nice veranda onto a set of leafy courtyards. I thought I would have to give it up but my landlord has changed his mind and offered me an extended lease - which I am happy to take. Despite its centrality, there is no noise - except that of the bells of the old nearby Church on Ignatiev St

I will miss (for the next few months) my home-made walnut, sesame and sunflower seed bread which I buy from the corner vegetarian restaurant - with superb fragrances wafting across just before I hit the shop itself.

I will also miss the Bulgarian Rakia and its incredible range of white wines - although I have been changing my allegiances in the lists of the last two.

Rakia is rather tasteless - compared to Romanian Tuica let alone Scottish or Irish whisky. But it is the spirit I have grown to prefer - although still insisting on the wine rather than plum or pear



variety For the past year or so, under the influence of my arty Bulgarian friends, my preferred "poison" has been Yambolski (a town in east-central Bulgaria). Half a litre for 4.5 euros! But I have now been introduced to [Kailashka Rakia](#) from Pleven, north central of the country. It has very good marketing - with a label reminding us of a Kentucky Bourbon and a 1922 date.

So I'm in mellow mood - having had a delightful afternoon cycling and picnicking with 2 young friends in the famous South Park with the quiet retro music one finds in Sofia's parks - generally guitar or jazz.

I used to be a fan of reasonably-priced St Ilyia white wines in central Bulgaria (Stara Zagora area) - part of the Edward Miroglia group - but have now gravitated to the [Black Sea Gold winery](#) of Pomorie (Burgas) whose Soroko (Chardonnay) has the sort of "tickle" I love. And the nearby [Ethno winery](#) offers amazing tastes and prices.

Friday, November 28, 2014

[Honouring the past](#)

I wonder if it is possible for Europeans (let alone Brits) to begin to put their head around how countries such as Bulgaria, Poland and Romania have suffered, in different ways, since 1939??

At least Poland had its various strands of resistance to be proud of.

And Romania its various emblems of modernity - visible in its architecture, inventors, writing or painting (to some of which I paid tribute earlier this year in my E-book on the country - [Mapping Romania](#)).

Indeed, as I was drafting this post, I was sent a poem from a poet - [Mariana Marin](#) - reckoned to be one of the best of modern poets and akin, in her power, to Sylvia Plath.

I hurry toward death
without a purpose,
without a wedding gown,
without a dowry of gold.
Without myself.
Serene and bitter,
I hurry across my native land
As if tomorrow had already been.

Needless to say - despite my love of Romanian poets such as Marin Sorescu and Ana Blandiana, I had never heard of Marin (who died in 2003).

But Bulgaria is small - with its back between the Danube and the Balkan/Rhodope mountain ranges - almost invisible.....save, that is for its tourism - at the Black Sea and skiing resorts.....

But it does have some people who have the skills and energy to project the country....particularly its artistic community - to whose [early 20th century \(realist\) painters](#) I devoted a small book a couple of years ago

Earlier this year I mentioned Ivan Daraktchiev's amazing [Bulgaria: Terra Europeansis Incognita](#) - 600 pages of superb photographs and challenging text about the history (ancient and recent) of the country. Ivan doesn't pull his punches as you will see from the next post.....

And yesterday I visited the Neron Gallery whose owner, Rumen Manov, is one of the best dealers in older Bulgarian paintings - to discover that he has just published a large 700-page celebration of some 2000 cultural artefacts and photographs from his own personal collection - in [A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria](#). The Intro puts it eloquently -

We the people of this piece stretch of land called Bulgaria are not the end of Europe, hidden somewhere in the end of the world - we are one of the oldest European civilizations. In our history there are thousands purposefully forgotten dates and events. But although quite destroyed, surviving documents speak eloquently and impartially. We Bulgarians love our ancient and beautiful land and this book is an attempt to remember the bright, timeless and eternal values.....

I wanted to do something that is not an encyclopaedia, not an album , not almanac not historical guide or reference book. It was like a seed in the ground. When he started to grow this idea in my mind I could see the colours of the book, as I started to build in time things so hesitated that year - two, long before I finish the book, I had the idea for it. What I saw was difficult for me to explain it to people who work with me..... then they told me that such a thing is not possible. This genre - no, moreover, that this is a job for an Institute not an individual. But the book is my witness to many survivors and their fathers, grandfathers -some of them departed from this world, things scattered in their markets and antiquarians.

I salute such people who, against the odds, are determined to remind locals of their heroes and traditions - however politically incorrect it may be these (stupid) days.....

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Nostalgia

I enjoy writing which focuses on objects - [WG Sebald's](#) use in his novels of old photos; [Edmund de Waal's focus](#) in a family history on amber miniatures; [Neil McGregor's](#) various histories built on various cultural artefacts eg [Germany - the memories of a nation](#) - whose [entire podacst can be heard here](#). It's good also to see some of the objects - on [an excellent blogsite](#) For me, this particular approach offers a real window into how people have lived their lives



in the past.

My little [book on Bulgarian Realist painters](#) (subtitled "How to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings") lists 140 painters from the early part of the 20th century and tries, in a few lines, to capture their significance.

This wasn't easy - I first have to put the artist's name in Cyrillic script and then copy and paste on Bulgarian google - then google translate what seem to be promising entries. Then there is the problem that these give the barest facts (except long lists of exhibitions and honours which add not a jot to our understanding of the person!) And it goes without saying that most art "criticism" is gobbledygook...

What I want is a sense of the character - how they lived their lives.....the friends they had. I am, for example, very fond of the [Gregor Naidenov's aquarelles of café life](#) in Sofia in the 1930-1950s - but, so far, have been unable to find out anything about the man. And I was impressed with a book on Boris Denev which included lovely black and white photographs of him with friends and in various



studios and exhibitions....also a recent book on a [classic Bulgarian photographer, Stoyan Sertev](#) which not only reproduced many of the old photographs (including lovely ones of Nicola Taney) but included a CD of the quartet he led.

I wrote a couple of weeks ago about the 700 page book I had discovered here based on Ruhmen Manov's personal collections of old Bulgarian photos and cultural artefacts [A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria](#) which gives a wonderful sense of the history of the country.....

Earlier in the year my E-book [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) used 16 different ways to try to get a handle on the country - namely travel guides; travelogues - which can be divided into the serious or the (sadly increasing number of) tongue-in-cheek type; histories - which deal with what are considered to be the key events in the shaping of a nation; novels; social and cultural histories (including jokes) - which give insights into how ordinary people lived their lives; memoirs and diaries - dealing with those who were more "distinguished"; blogs; magazines; television, films and plays; photographs; paintings and caricatures; buildings; conversations and encounters; friendships; music; food and wine

It's not easy to find books which do justice to countries - travel books do their best but are somewhat one dimensional. More serious books suffer from being written from one particular academic discipline - be it history, economics, politics. Anthropology seems to offer more eg this one I unearthed - [The anthropology of Ireland](#). And this series on the [cultural history of cities](#) is quite excellent.

Tourism may be one of the biggest global industries but it offers few real opportunities to fathom the soul of a country - although a retired generation with time and education is now beginning to

experience some of the treasures which Europe offers.....and can access books from such publishing houses as [The Collected Traveler](#), The Intercultural Press and [Cities of the Imagination](#) which offer great cultural insights not only into countries but even to a few cities. Readers will know that I recently started my own contribution to this genre when my daughters started to visit me in Romania and Bulgaria - see the list of E-books at the top-right of the blog....

So perhaps it's about time that someone gave Bulgaria/Sofia a cultural treatment. Rumen's book (which I bought at a discount yesterday - 75 euros) is a useful start - linked to the book on Stoyan Sertev; to [Sofia Enigma and Stigma](#) which contains evocative black and white photos of old, crumbling buildings in Sofia; and to the marvellous 600 page [Sofia's Mount Athos](#) which is a superb study (complete with photos and GPS coordinates) of the 46 monasteries which cluster around Sofia - many since the 14th century. And Elisabeth Kostova's [The Historian](#).

Despite the continuing political silences about the 42 years Bulgaria spent under communism, the 20th century can still be felt in Sofia - only this week I bought a (copy of) a little 1947 litho scene of the part of Vasil Levsky Street which has the University at the end, complete with one car and a horse and cart - part of a series dictator Georgi Dimitrov apparently commissioned of artists then. That was the same day I came across a lovely 1935 landscape by Boris Denev - banned by the communist regime from paintings after 1944 - which had been lying in a house for several decades. It still has the typical white frame used in the 1940/1950s.

And one of my prize possessions is a 1942 journal on every page of which are several pencilled figures - clearly the work of Ilyia Beshkov, the famous caricaturist.

Saturday, December 13, 2014

[Access to National Galleries](#)

I've been a bit sniffy in the past about Sofia's National Gallery of Art - so let me take my hat off to them for their display of digital facilities. I was a bit annoyed on Thursday to be denied access to an exhibition of Nouveau Art's Nikola Rainov (for reasons of some private party) but was placated by being given the opportunity to use a smart phone to access some 200 watercolours of the past century which have not so far been available to the public - along with useful information about the painters.



This is part of a wider project of gradual digitization of the entire archive of the museum in 2015.

I managed to see the Rainov exhibition the following day - you don't often see his work. And it was accompanied by a superb small catalogue - sadly almost entirely monolingual. Running in a neighbouring room, was another delightful small exhibition of urban life here a hundred years ago - with a charming video of an elderly lady displaying various artefacts from the period.

And my ever-ready camera was able to catch this shot of a very sharply-dressed elderly visitor to the gallery.....

Lack of translation is one of two features which used to distinguish the National Gallery from the municipal one across the road - whose catalogues have been bilingual for quite some years. The second feature is pricing - the national Gallery used to charge 5 euros (now 3 - with pensioners half price). The municipal gallery was free - until last year when a nominal charge was introduced (with pensioners free).

It reminded me of one of my political colleagues in the 1970s [Janey Buchan](#) (who became an MEP in the 1979), She was a tireless advocate in the 60s of the rights of ordinary people (before the days of the Consumer Association) and was particularly strong on the importance of free entry to museums and art galleries, Thatcher put pressure on to introduce charges ([although the British Museum held out](#)) but entry was made free again in 2001 - with significant subsequent increases in visitors.

And I was glad to see that the Neil Mc Gregor, the renowned Director of the British Museum had declined an invitation to direct New York's Metropolitan Museum because it charged an entry fee. The attitude of Sofia City Gallery is yet another proof of the superiority of municipal to central government

Thursday, January 22, 2015

[Strolling](#)

This is the fourth flat I've had in almost 8 years in Sofia - and it's interesting what different perspectives (and indeed feelings) about the city one gets from the different micro-neighbourhoods. John Berger's phrase "[ways of seeing](#)" comes to mind.

Two were in spitting distance of one another - near the football stadium (Nikolai Pavlovitch and Khan Krum streets) - each going back to the 1920s.... Patriarch Eftemi Boulevard and [Graf](#)



[Ignatiev](#) street were the backbone of the area. The very names resonate with history.....[Krum](#) referring to the first Bulgarian Empire; [Ignatiev](#) to the Russian military assistance in removing the Ottoman yoke from the Bulgarians; [Pavlovitch](#) the most influential of Bulgaria's early painters.

The most modern and indeed the first was on [Lajos Kossuth](#) St, just off [Hristov Botev](#) Boulevard - next to a lovely old Bulgarian revival building which actually houses the Catholic Prelate! The street names celebrate the power of ideas about

independence in the 19th century....

Now I'm in a charming period flat [in the old area](#) between [Vasil Levski](#), Dondukov and Princess Maria Luise Boulevards - on the edge of the Jewish neighbourhood which was focused on the fascinating women's market, subject [of an excellent brief here](#).

Prince Dondukov played (as Russian Governor) a key role in the drafting of the Bulgarian constitution which was famed in its time as one of the world's most liberal. "[Stefan Stambolov and the emergence of the Bulgarian nation](#)" (1993) is a rare book in the English language about those times.....

The neighbourhood has rapidly become my favourite...it's a mere 10 minute stroll up Danube St (where my flat criss-crosses with Tsar Simeon St) to the magnificent Alexander Nevski Cathedral behind whose dome Mount Vitosha dominates the skyline. And then down past the colourful Russian church and the back of what was the Palace and is now the National Gallery - with its small park area and statues. The through the little park with the jazz buskers, the National Theatre and Sofia City Gallery via Vitosha walking street, Levski Boulevard to the Rodina Hotel where I swim and keep fit.

It was four years ago (!) that I [wrote of the joys of strolling around Sofia](#) which you can experience vicariously in "A Walk in the Street of Sofia Guidebook " (Kras Plus 2002) - a marvellous bilingual history of the 6 parts of central Sofia for those who want to appreciate the city's singularity by foot. Sadly I've not so far been able to find another copy in the bookshops...but you can get a sense of the area from the album named "walk around the flat" in my [flickr account](#)

[Sofia Enigma and Stigma](#) (Enthusiast 2011) by "dandy" Ljubomir Milchev is a lovely little ode to the city which contains evocative black and white photos of old, crumbling buildings in my neighbourhood. Imagine my delight in discovering, in a nearby [magic bookshop](#) on Rakovski St, a booklet produced with great care and thought - "Time and Beauty; art nouveau in the Bulgarian cities" by an Italian - Vittore Collina (2014) - a real labour of love.

And it was just a couple of minutes from the Cathedral that I found on Saturday the most amazing gallery which has been lying waiting for me for 7 years - the Atelier of Bulgaria's Grand Old Man of Art, Svetlin Roussev... but that needs an entry on its own

Friday, February 6, 2015

A Chance Encounter

It was typical that the very day I was hoping to put my new E-book on Bulgaria online. I stumbled on yet another great but neglected Bulgarian painter....And all thanks to family, friendship and drink!

My eldest daughter will visit me (with her husband) for the first time in a week and I therefore had to find a bed settee. A visit to IKEA soon produced the goods - which lay in pieces in the spare room for a week or so.... My friend Yovo promised to come to the rescue on Wednesday - and I duly set off to the nearby CasaVino to ensure he was properly recompensed for what proved to be 2 hours of work....

As I hit the park, I decided to see if the Vaska Emanouilova gallery had anything new to show and was quite stunned by what I found - an exhibition of the work of Iakim Banchev (1884-1967 - a magnificent portraitist and landscape artist who captures, for me, the essence of Bulgarian art and society in the first half of the 20th Century



Admitted 1903 to the National School of Drawing in the studio painting of Ivan Markvichka and Ivan Angelov, he was part of the student flow to the Art Academy in Dresden, where he stays until March 1904. Then he goes to Turin - where he graduates and stays for five years. In 1905 he takes part in an exhibition with his work "Nude" and received First Prize (the picture is located in the Turin Museum). He returned to his native Lovech, bringing with him his paintings from his workshops in the academies - a few of which were purchased in the early 50s by Sofia City Gallery,

He works as a military artist in the Balkan Wars and creates dozens of large-scale canvasses immortalising the horror of war (now part of the collection of the Museum of Military History in Sofia). But he wasn't able to break into the official art world and headed across the Atlantic hoping to find work as an architect. In summer 1923 he settled in Manhattan - but his hopes to find work as an architect quickly evaporated and he was forced to go back to his painting from which he earned enough money to return to his beloved Mina.

Financial difficulties forced him to leave again and, from July 1927 to July 1933, the Banchev family lived in the US but saved enough from portraits to allow them to return to BG and buy in Sofia a property at 5a "August 11" St where he designed his own studio on the top floor .

In the remaining three decades of life he worked in the pharmaceutical office of his brother Ivan. After Sept 1944 he withdraws from the artistic partly because of the change in tastes but mostly because of his bad bourgeois past.

Despite attempts after the political changes in the country to adapt and to participate in exhibitions, his works are never admitted. "As a kind of reward for his modest nature, UBA accepts one work in 1949 but doesn't display it. He sank into the solitude of his own studio, where he painted and then destroyed the works to avoid trouble - Sometimes doing portraits on order for a ministerial office with pictures of Botev, Levski Georgi Dimitrov. Portraits not signed. Jakim Banchev meets death on the doorstep of his home on January 19, 1967".

Here's a brief TV programme on the [exhibition which runs at the Emanouiliva Gallery](#) until the end of the month.

A Daughter's Visit

The nomadic existence I've had for the past 25 years has meant that meetings with loved ones are events which carry anticipation, appreciation and memories....

I have three daughters - two from my second marriage who were quite young when I started my wanderings and were therefore able to visit me several times in the 1990s in various parts of Central Europe. When my mother died in 2005, my quarterly visits to

Scotland stopped and meetings therefore quite rare. I was delighted that they were both able to visit me in my homes in this part of the world in 2013 and 2014 - events for which I prepared with the E-books on mapping cultural aspects of Bulgaria and Romania.

My eldest daughter's career and family have made such visits impossible - until now...and I was therefore delighted to welcome Jan and Peter to Sofia for a fleeting visit to Sofia (here they are with Vladimir Dimitrov-Maistera



Thursday, February 19, 2015

Profiling the art market



[Angela Minkova](#) has set me a challenge. She is a quirky Bulgarian artist who deserves to be better known. The previous post carries one of her artefacts I have in my Carpathian mountain house - and today's one of her Balchik prints (which also occupies a prominent place there).

I am not an art dealer - rather a writer, networker and art collector (of Bulgarian paintings) - but she has asked me for help in raising her profile.

She is not alone in feeling somewhat frustrated and anxious. It is, of course, the quintessential fate of artists - but particularly of those from small, poorer countries on Europe's periphery which have only the vaguest of profiles...In Bulgaria's casethe Black Sea, skiing, wine andpoisoned umbrella tips....

Traditionally artists have needed galleries to display their paintings - whether individually or in special exhibitions - but the internet now offers an additional, more direct, route to the buyer. There are a lot of private galleries in Sofia - but (currently) no guide to them for the visitor. The annotated list I have in my book [Bulgarian Encounters - a cultural romp](#) focuses on the small galleries selling mainly the classic painters of the early part of the last century - and identifies 17 in this category.

There are at least that number selling contemporary art - although only a few with owners who identify and actively promote quality work. My friend Vihra's [Astry Gallery](#) is the most prominent of these - and she occasionally takes work for exhibition in European capitals.

So the question these days for Bulgarian artists is - how should they best promote themselves?

The choices are various - through

- **traditional galleries** - individual paintings/ special exhibitions/ group exhibitions?
- **word of mouth?**
- **websites** - own sites or individual entries in "gateway" or portal sites such as [SaatchiArt](#)?
- **portals** - marketing contemporary Bulgarian painting eg [ModernBulgarianArtists](#)
- **Facebook?**

The answer is simple - through all of these routes! As is argued in this well-written article which [gives great tips for artists](#) - from a [site full of much better advice](#) than I'm capable of giving. My initial thought had been to target some of Europe's art critics - but the article shows the error in such an approach. I strongly advise you to read the article and also [this one](#)

Although I know very little about the art market, I have been lucky enough to be able to practice strategic skills and networking for45 years....I have a natural inclination to look at a situation and want to identify the key players who form the system or market - suppliers, consumers and

intermediaries with the latter as the most complex. It is they who shape perceptions and channel (or not) the demand and supply.....

My first inclination therefore with this problem facing Bulgarian artists is to PROFILE - ie to identify (a) the relevant galleries (real or virtual) and (b) the potential buyers for the paintings of contemporary Bulgarian artists and then try to sketch the profiles of these groups.

That's actually three distinct groups which need to be mapped and profiled -

- Bulgarian physical galleries
- Virtual galleries
- The art buyer

The easiest to deal with is the first - I've already said there are very few effective "impressarios" of Bulgarian contemporary artists. [Last sanctuaries of originality](#) contained some short profiles I did a couple of years ago

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

[Good viewing in Sofia](#)

Some great exhibitions recently here in Sofia

You don't often get to see collections of **Nikola Tanev's** paintings - the last one was 5 years ago at the National Gallery. But last month the Finesse private Gallery put on a [fascinating collection some of which I've put on flickr](#)

Spassov, Angel (1884-1974) was a well-known sculptor - one of many greats produced by Bulgaria although the current exhibition at the Bulgarian Union of Artists on Shipka St also shows what a good painter he was...A [great catalogue on his work](#) was recently issued by Pleven Gallery



And the National Gallery has just opened a rare exhibition of industrial landscapes which cover not only the communist period but the early part of the century too. Here are [some examples from my flickr collection](#).

The first is a powerful canvas (1965) from one of Bulgaria's first women industrial landscape artists - Maria Stolarova (who's still going strong - but now with still-lives);

and the second a 1950s Nikola Tanev

Those wanting to see more of examples of Socialist realist can consult [Socialist construction in the work of Bulgarian artists](#) (Sofia 1954)

Monday, April 20, 2015

Busts I admire

OK I admit it - I admire busts - particularly the sort I see in Museums

I have grown increasingly to admire Bulgarian sculpture - for example [Angel Spassov](#) (1884-1974) and, on the contemporary scene, one of Bulgaria's foremost sculptors [Spartak \(Paris\) Dermendjiev](#) - who has done a diverse series of clay sculptures whose [There are no Happy Bulgarians](#) and [mother](#) I admire most....

So not altogether surprising that, as someone who has become (in the past few years) an art collector, I submitted this weekend to sitting (actually standing) for "Paris" as he "did my head".....His uncle was a partisan during the war who sported the alias of Spartak - to which Paris owes his name. Some years back he gave me a clay carving of Spartacus when I bought a small bronze he did....



The weekend's [process can be seen here](#) - finishing touches will be done these days; the bust then sliced and emptied (ugh!!); some darkener added; some drying; and then placed in the kiln for almost 12 hours.....with some 15% reduction in mass....

Although we had some good laughs as we chatted (and he sloshed on the clay and carved away), he chose to go for the **severe look**.....It was a fascinating experience during which I learned more about the man
watch this space.....

Sunday, May 10, 2015

Unwelcoming Pleven



Pleven is a city in the northern part of Bulgaria which looks rather forbidding from the heights of the main Russe-Sofia road above which skirt it - densely-packed fingers of white high-rise blocks pointing to the sky. You can imagine the Russian troops in 1877 surveying the settlements as they struggled to break the Turkish siege.....

It has two famous artistic sons - the caricaturist Ilyia Beshkov () and the grand old man of Bulgarian art, Svetlin Roussev, who was Chairman of the Bulgarian Union of Artists from 1973-85 and whose amazing collection in the Sofia Atelier which bears his name (just down from the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral) I had discovered only in December. But is actually one of a pair - the other being in Pleven - to which I made a slight detour on Friday on my way to Bucharest....

The city is approached by strange, empty dual carriageways which suddenly disgorge you into bustling traffic buzzing around a series of hills. It is a couple or so years since I last visited its Ilyia Beshkov gallery - to whose concrete carbuncle I was guided by intuition.....The same happened yesterday... I swung right up a hill and soon caught sight of the old low-slung building on the left which is the National History Museum, with a park on the right which turned out to contain the Svetlin Roussev Gallery....Fortunately there is still uncontrolled parking in the quiet area just under the Beshkov Gallery.

Svetlin Roussev had apparently acquired thousands of artefacts during his time at the heart of Bulgarian painting - passed on presumably by his colleagues. In the last half of the 80s he fell out of favour with the authorities for the stand he took on various issues - and I was shown with some glee in the Sofia library a copy of the one of the Encyclopedias of Bulgarian art from which most of his entry had been airbrushed from history....

His Pleven collection has found an appropriate location in an old Ottoman Hamam - which has one of the most beautiful interiors I have seen. Beshkov cartoons start the tour and my camera was just about to spring into action when I was checked by one of the younger attendants - the first time this had happened in all my tours of regional Bulgarian galleries. Fortunately I was able to use my link with the Sofia gallery which I phoned to have things sorted out.



But the same happened when I popped in to renew my acquaintance with the Beshkov gallery - and this time no friends in high places to help!

What, I wonder, is the thinking here? I use no flash; the gallery offers no books whose sales might suffer from art enthusiasts with cameras? In any event I was informed that if I sent a written request in advance, I would be allowed.....It was so cold on my last (winter's) visit that I had been left alone - the attendants, wrapped in their furcoats had been huddled in a side-room in front of an electric heater!

So bad marks to an unwelcoming Pleven.....I will not forget the woman whose spiteful hand is trying to block a Boris Denev painting I really wanted to have join the small file I have on one of my favourite Bulgarian painters.....(so many fall into that category!!)

Saturday, July 25, 2015

Culinary and cultural delights despite the Sofia heat

I don't remember such heat as I've experienced this past week in Sofia - although I lived through 4 Tashkent summers; 2 [Baku ones](#) and 2 Bishkek ones.

The saving graces for the latter 2 were the sea (Caspian) and the mountain respectively. And Vitosha mountain does give Sofia delightful breezes.....



The afternoon trips to the (indoor) pool also help. The (ageing) body needs such compensations - which is why I look forward to returning shortly to my (Carpathian) redoubt which was still in June a bit cold and damp.....

In the meantime I'm enjoying the culinary delights of Sofia in my new neighbourhood - Papa Joe's and a great street café with very tasty Czech beer....And a great Chardonnay from a new winery in Svilengrad - [Santa Maria](#), for only 3 euros.....courtesy of Sofia's [best little wineshop](#) (at the Russian Monument) owned by young Asen Tsekov



Sofia's big event a couple of months ago was the opening of its new art complex in what was its Museum of European Art. It took me 4 hours to do it all justice - but I am a copious note-taker (for my ongoing project about Bulgarian art - [Memory's Veil - lifting the shroud concealing Bulgarian Art](#)).

And here's a little painting of us both we were wonderfully surprised to be given this week by Yuliana Sotirova.....

Saturday 5 September

How Sofia opened Robert Conquest's (and the world's) Eyes

Robert Conquest - who died last month at the age of 98 - was the best known British investigator in the post-war period of the true scale of the communist tyranny. During the 1960s he edited eight volumes of work including *"Common Sense About Russia"* (1960), *"The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities"* (1960) and *"Power and Policy in the USSR"* (1961). His other early works on the Soviet Union included *"Courage of Genius: The Pasternak Affair"* (1961) and *"Russia After Khrushchev"* (1965) published in the United States republished as The Contemporary Soviet Union Series by [Frederick Praeger](#), whose U.S. company published, in addition to works by [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#), [Milovan Đilas](#) and a number of books on communism.

Many of us saw him overly-fixated on soviet atrocities - but the opening of soviet records after 1990 proved him correct. I learned several new things from the obituaries and tributes. First that [he was a poet](#) and close friend of Kingsley Amis - with a strong line in doggerel.

But the most important insight was that his revulsion against Soviet tyranny stemmed from his personally witnessing the Communist takeover of Bulgaria in 1944 - an event which [I have written about here](#). In 1944, Conquest was posted to Bulgaria as a liaison officer to the Bulgarian forces fighting under Soviet command, attached to the Third Ukrainian Front, and then to the [Allied Control Commission](#). There, he met Tatiana Mihailova, who later became his second wife. At the end of the war, he joined the Foreign Office, returning to the British Legation in Sofia. Witnessing first-hand the communist takeover in Bulgaria, he became completely disillusioned with communist ideas. He left Bulgaria in 1948, helping Tatiana escape the new regime. Back in London, he divorced his first wife and married Tatiana.

The third fascinating fact is that, on the war's end, he actually joined the Labour Party's International Bureau - working therefore with Dennis Healey (sadly dead just a week or so after I wrote this - at 98). Conquest then joined the Foreign Office's [Information Research Department](#) (IRD), a unit created by the Labour government to "collect and summarize reliable information about Soviet and communist misdoings, to disseminate it to friendly journalists, politicians, and trade unionists, and to support, financially and otherwise, anticommunist publications."

You can read [more about his life here](#). He is an obvious candidate for the next entry in the blog [Britain is no country for old men](#)

6 November 2015

Despairing of the World – how artists cope



I [wrote in April](#) about my [experience of having my bust sculpted](#) by one of Bulgaria's best-known sculptors - [Spartak Dermendjiev](#) (also known as "Paris"). His uncle was a partisan in the second-world war and Spartak was baptized in his honour with his nom de guerre. Last night I unveiled the completed bust for a few friends who were available.

Like most good artists, perhaps, he displays his contradictions more openly than the rest of us....His charming manner and [superb studies](#) conceal a despair about the world which finds expression in the part of his work he calls "cynical art" - artefacts which, for me, are more appropriately described as "[erotic art](#)", focusing for the most part on pudenda and vulvae.

The theme of Don Quixote is, for some reason, a beloved one in the work of Bulgarian sculptors and also figures in Spartak's work - in 2003 indeed he had an exhibition entitled "Don Quixote dies" which for him -

reveals the Way of Despair - from the lunacy of Idealism, through the rude awakening of living, to Despair and Death.

Art creates Idealists, life kills them...

Don Quixote did not die from the sword of the Evil, rather from the poison of Despair....

There is no place in life for Don Quixote, and he left... Yet to appear time and again like a ghost reminding us that there is no need of Idealism in Life....

Outside Temples, beyond the cover pages of books, beyond the frames of paintings, the Faith in Good and Justice dies...

Don Quixote died, but left his ghost to remind us that without Faith in the Good - the human in us dies...

Recently he also staged an event whose title also reflects on his outlook - "Fin Du Monde".

The [video of the event](#) is worth watching although you have to wait until about the 7th minute to get the denouement (I'm the guy in the blue anorak who wanders across the scene at the end of the 2nd minute and pretends to ignore the painting!) And here is his [tribute to Georgi Markov](#) the Bulgarian writer whose ultimate dissidence brought his famous murder on a London street, pierced with a poisoned umbrella tip.....

I must confess that I am drawn to the work of artists who have a sense of outrage about the world - summed up in German poet Bert Brecht's memorable challenge - "So ist die Welt - und musst nicht so sein". I was drawn immediately to [Kathe Kollwitz](#)'s powerful depictions of poverty and war in her graphics and sculpture; to [George Grosz](#)'s savage portrayals of Weimar life and the Pillars of German Society (which I use as illustrations for some of my posts); to [Frans Masereel](#)'s woodcuts (ditto); to [Goya](#)'s series on the victims of war.

[Hieronymous Bosch](#) was, of course, the original inspiration for scenes of horror.

And British cartoonist [Ralph Steadman](#) has been a hero since the 1970s - with [Gerald Scarfe](#).

When, however, I hear the phrase "cynical art" I think not of such people but of Damian Hirst - who has cynically milked stupid rich people of their money - and duped many galleries into showing his offensive rubbish. Or of the work of [Tracey Emin](#)



Spartak talks of "sin" and I wondered at one stage whether his use of the phrase "cynical" art was a pun on the word sin.....Since we have become friends, we often talk of the phrase - indeed he invites me to help improve the English translation of the titles he gives his various

pudenda!

I have googled "cynical art" and get references only to some modern Chinese movements....it simply is not a phrase that has caught on...I tried "Nihilistic art" and got Dada references.



But it is the work of the German artists of the first quarter of the 20th century which best caught the "Angst" or despair of that period... Although I like their work I don't see it as [nihilistic](#). Paul Celan memorably said that "After Auschwitz, it is impossible to write poetry". Googling

brought me this interesting quote -

Until now nihilism has been a theory, an abstraction... the dark muse of poetry, philosophy and art. But now we are confronted with a nihilistic moment that neither Turgenev nor Nietzsche could have prophesied: a global meltdown wrought by wars - on terror, on planet, on self.

We are confronted with the moment when this experiment of ours on Planet Earth meets its spectacular and terrifying end, when civilization reaches its summit and begins to tumble into permanent decline. This new breed of nihilism - call it eco-nihilism, psycho-nihilism, apocalypto-nihilism - falls far beyond the bounds of the deeply personal loss of meaning Nietzsche warned of.

This new kind of nihilism degrades our very cosmic fiber, consuming not only our psyche, but the planet itself. And for this new, collective brand of nihilism, no philosophy has ever been written, no remedy ever prescribed.

Coincidentally I came across a couple of reviews of Michel Houellebecq's novels. Karl Ove Knaussgard - the title of whose [multi-volume My Struggle](#) (ie another "Mein Kampf"!!!) hints at the bleakness of his own vision - pays [tribute to Houellebecq's work in this review](#). Another long review puts it bluntly-

callow, cynical and sex-obsessed, openly racist and misogynistic in turn, rife with B-grade porn writing, full of contempt for art and intellectuals, and operate on a kind of low masculine anger at the indignities of being beta-chimp. Houellebecq's novels owe their reputation to artistic achievement as much as any naughty thrill they elicit.

I've read a couple of his books and this quotation from "Elementary Particles" seems to sum up his world view -

His effort at self-analysis emerges: "But I don't understand, basically, how people manage to go on living. I get the impression everybody must be unhappy; we live in such a simple world you understand. There's a system based on domination, money and fear ... there's a ... system based on seduction and sex. And that's it. Is it really possible to live and to believe that there's nothing else"

Perhaps Shakespeare [put it better](#) -

*..... Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

I can understand nihilism but, despite my recognition of the truth of such an analysis, I can't support it. I still believe in goodness.

I see many [reasons for despair](#) about the direction the world has taken us collectively - but feel, at personal level, it helps if we cultivate a more "fatalistic" (Buddhist??) approach - "this too will pass"..... And that's also why I find it difficult to deal with cynicism.

Woody Allen perhaps expressed it best when he suggested that "The artist's job is not to succumb to despair but to find an antidote for the emptiness of existence."

Passion and Dedication

I sometimes think that [Newspeak](#) has taken over. For years, for example, the journals have been full of talk of "innovation" and yet we live and breathe in ever more (globally) homogenised societies where "innovation" is, as often as not, simply what we used to call "product differentiation" - ie minute tinkering in design.

One of the reasons I am so fond of Sofia is that I am constantly coming across here the quiet assertion of real (as distinct from pseudo) individuality and creativity.....Its art galleries and bookshops have been described in these posts as "[the last sanctuaries of originality](#)" - with the [Astry Gallery](#) as the leading example. It's not just the way interesting (young and old) Bulgarian artists are cultivated and presented in her small gallery - it's the friendly almost family atmosphere. And the tastefully-designed bookmarks which mark every exhibition - real collectors' items - are a simple gesture of that aesthetic commitment. They are produced by a young couple who have also become a great help to me eg in the production of my booklet on Bulgarian art (just about to go into [a second edition](#)) and in setting up my new website.

Danail in particular has an exemplary "Can-Do" attitude as a result of which his little company has won more custom not only from me but from at least one other foreigner who found not only the quotes and deadlines unbeatable but the professionalism of the work deeply impressive.



Let me give some other examples - last Saturday, returning from the tribute to the Paris dead at the nearby French Embassy, I stumbled across an incredible little pub (intriguingly named "*Sterling Club*") just round the corner from my flat...It looks old but has in fact been operating for only three years....my next visit (with friends) I hope to get the story.....

Last year I was struck with [two beautiful and highly original books](#) about aspects of Bulgarian history and culture by two Bulgarians I now count as friends - Ivan Daraktchiev, with his

amazing [Bulgaria: Terra Europeansis Incognita; and Rumen Manov with his](#) 700-page celebration of some 2000 cultural artefacts and photographs from his own personal collection - in [A Fairy Tale about Bulgaria](#). Each was a labour of love - paid for by the author....

And Wednesday I shall be at a tasting of some young wines in a small shop at the Russian Monument which I have been cultivating almost since its start 3 years ago. [Vinoorenda](#) is run by a young man, Asen, and his father and, to judge by the cards and references at last weekend's Annual Wine-tasting, has already built up an impressive reputation amongst particularly the smaller, craft vineyards in the country....

The blog has previously noted the proliferation in central Sofia of tiny shops run by both young and old.....a powerful expression of individuality which is repressed by the large stores which are the feature of most downtowns in European cities.

Is this just an accident of the narrow streets?I have a feeling it reflects something more cultural. Bulgarians, for example, don't seem to have adopted the debt life-style of other nations..... They're not taken in by fashions. They have a respect for healthy foods and vegetables (and for their country's history and culture).....

Bulgaria is a small, relatively isolated country, surrounded with indifferent if not unfriendly neighbours - perhaps this has developed an awareness of being on their own and needing to work at something about which they're passionate?

Coincidentally I'm reading one of Robert Greene's recent books called [Mastery](#). Guardian readers, as you will see [from this review](#), turn their nose up at Greene but I confess I enjoy his books - not least for their layout and charming tales of emperors and great men.

[Mastery](#) is a celebration of the life of the "vocation" and the dedication which goes with it....In these times of shallow showmanship and deceit, we desperately need the dedicated focus on quality of single-minded people.....Of course, those wanting a more serious read should go to Howard Gardner's [Creating Minds](#)

Monday 23 November 2015

A Hard Day's Night

Bulgaria is famous for its red wines - I remember first coming across them in the Glasgow Oddbins in the 1970s and, lo indeed, 40 out of the 50 best wines recommended in the Bulgaria's magic little annual "[Divino Guide](#)" are red.

But it was their white wines which were the great discovery for me when I first motored through Bulgaria in 2002 on the way to Turkey. I was quite stunned by first the crispness of the vastly underrated Targovishte Muscat (which rightly won a bronze medal in a Paris fair a couple of years back) and then by the sheer variety I was encountering.

Now my palate (and body) reject red wines - apart from the heavy Mavruds in the Melnik area and reds from the Struma valley which crosses the border with Greece

But there were still more than 100 varieties of white on offer at the 2015 tasting of Bulgarian wines which took place a week ago at the Narodni Dom Kulturna (I always confuse it with NKD - which my young Bulgarian friends tell me is proof that I was a spy!).

That's quite a slog for one day - so it was very early to bed that evening. Sunday was for the roses - fewer in number so I emerged after a couple of hours with a clear head and an even greater commitment to their whites.... I had missed last year's tasting but had been sober enough in 2013 to keep [some notes of how I marked the whites](#)

To prepare for the 2015 tasting I had pulled out and checked the scribbles on my copy of the great little [Catalogue of Bulgarian Wine](#) (by T Tanovska and K Iontcheva - annual) which I use to record my impressions. [The Wine Routes of Bulgaria](#) (Vina Zona 2014) is also a nice little - if less technical - profile of 64 of the good Bulgaria vineyards. No fewer than [66 vineyards were presenting](#) on 20-22 November - which means about 400 bottles were waiting to be tasted!!

Six bottles battled it out for my palate's favour this year

[Marvin's Traminer](#) (6 euros) is from a vineyard in the Sliven area (in the centre of the country). A region whose wines first impressed me some years ago

[Boi and AR Pomorie](#) had a great *Chardonnay and Viognier* (6 euros). Pomorie at the Black Sea has some of the best white wines - but this particular winery was new to me....

[Domaine Menada](#) had a winner (*Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay*) for only 3.50 euros! A long established winery - near Stara Zagora in the middle of the country

[Villa Yustina](#) - [Traminer](#) 3 euros

[Edoardo Miroglio](#) was the best of quite a few *Chardonnay Barriques* in the fair - Sliven area again....

Santa Maria at the moment is my favourite winery - in the south of the country near the Greek border - and offers two white wines (a *Sauvignon Blanc*; and a *Chardonnay* - 4 euros) which won great applause at my own home wine tasting earlier in the month

Seven wineries jostled closely behind -

[Chateau Bourgozone](#) (a favourite of mine on the western part of the Danube stretch) actually had 2 wines which caught my fancy - a *Sauvignon Blanc*; and a *Chardonnay Barrique*.

[Levent](#) - also on the Danube - had a wonderful *Traminer/Miskat* from the Russe wine house. In the past few years their whites have been too strong for me.....

[Eolis](#) from the southern borderregion had a lovely *Gewurztraminer*

[Alexandra Estate](#) (Sakar Region) a *Vermentino*

[Four Friends](#) vineyard is in the central region, near Stara Zagora and had a great *Sauvignon Blanc* (6 euros)

[Neragora](#) is a new organic vineyard in the Plovdiv area (receiving Italian help). Their *Chardonnay and Misket* was very acceptable

[Todoroff](#) - two of their wines pleased me - [Rainbow Green](#) (*Muscat and Aligote*); and Rainbow Silver (*Cuve - SB and Chardonnay with some Viognier*). Todoroff are in the village of Brestovitsa very near Plovdiv

And, finally, four which didn't score quite so high but deserve a mention -

[Levent](#) - *Riesling* (5 euros)

[Zelanos](#) - *Pino Gris* (7 euros)

[Saedinie](#) - *Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier*

[Villa Yambol](#) - *Chardonnay* (2.5 euros!)

Favourite Vineyards in south-east - [Bratanov](#); [Milidare](#); [Medi Valley](#); [Katarzyna](#);

Favourite Vineyards in south [Strymon](#); [Villa Melnik](#)

Favourite Vineyards at Black Sea are [Black Sea Gold](#); [Ethno](#) - in a village near Burgas on the Black Sea near the border with Turkey; and [Slavyansti](#) - ditto

Central - [Targovishte winery](#); [Starosel](#); [Vinprom Yambol](#)

Balkan perceptions

I've been quiet this past week simply because I've been wrapped up in what I hoped would be the final stages of completing the new book on Bulgaria - now running at 222 pages (compared with the 56 of [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#))

Trouble is that I keep finding new names for my annotated list - 15 or so in the past week thanks to several finds and a visit to Pazardzhik and to a new graphics exhibition at Sofia's City Gallery



These, however, are of minority interest and are therefore relegated to the last section of this post - which tries to confront the fact that potential readers may be disinclined to read a book which has "Bulgaria" in the title... I'm starting to wonder whether I would be better advised to use Balkan imagery in the title....

After all, tales of travels and exploits in these parts have apparently been part of the staple diet for British readers for several centuries....as we now know thanks to the publications in the past 15 years of literary scholars such as [Maria Todorova](#), [Andrew Hammond](#) and [Vesna Goldsworthy](#) who have carefully itemised and summarised the writings of foreign visitors to the area - and identified various phases of the "West's encounter with the near East"...Hammond's *The Debated Lands - British and American Representation of the Balkans*, for example, suggests that - balkanist discourse has passed through three distinct paradigms. These are denigration before 1914; romanticisation in the inter-war years; and, after an ambivalent mixture of sympathy and disappointment during the Cold War, a return to denigration in the 1990s.

He then goes on to argue that -

pre-1914 denigration reveals close similarities to colonial discourse, how inter-war romanticism reflects the modernist quest for exoticism and psychological escape and how the reappearance of denigration coincides with the advent of postmodern scepticism.

Todorova has a fascinating chapter exploring how the region came to be called the Balkans (it was previously known as Haemus.....

The earliest mention of the name Balkan known to me comes from a fifteenth century memorandum of the Italian humanist writer and diplomat Philippos Callimachus (1437-1496). Persecuted by Pope Paul II, Callimaco settled in Poland and became a close adviser to the Polish king. He was the author of a history of the deeds of Wladyslav III Warnencyk, in which he left a short description of the Haemus, which he saw when he visited the Constantinople on diplomatic missions. In his 1490 memorandum to Pope Innocent VIII, Callimaco wrote that the local people used the name Balkan for the mountain: "quem incolae Bolchanum vocant."

[Misha Glenny](#) is one of the foremost commentators on the Balkans with a massive book [The Balkans 1804-1912 - Nationalism, War and the Great Powers](#) to his credit. He [does not mince words](#) when it comes with dealing with the negative reputation the area has

To help set the record straight here are a few lesser-known facts about the Balkan peninsula that never make it into the newspapers. For those who would defend the Balkans but don't know how, they will be useful for dropping into conversations about how hopeless the situation there is.

1. The only country allied to the Axis that refused to allow any of its Jewish citizens to be deported to Nazi death camps was Bulgaria.

2. The single most violent period in Balkan history in terms of casualties sustained and the territorial extent of the warfare was a direct consequence of Hitler's decision to occupy Greece, a decision prompted by Mussolini's failed attempt to invade Greece in 1940. The Nazi resolve in March 1941 to dismember Yugoslavia was accompanied by the installation of a brutal Fascist administration in Croatia that was entirely unrepresentative of the political aspirations of the Croat people. Until Pavelic was installed in Croatia, there had been no history of mass violence between Serbs and Croats.

3. The Stalinist dictatorships that took root in Romania and Bulgaria were imposed by an agreement reached by Stalin and Churchill. In exchange for handing over these territories to Soviet influence, Churchill, and later Truman, were given a free hand by Stalin to smash a Communist insurgency in Greece that was on the verge of taking power with minimal foreign support.

4. Since 1989, the governments and people of Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Greece have all resisted attempts by nationalists to destabilise the local or regional polity.

5. The main victims of the sanctions imposed by the UN on Serbia have been the surrounding states, a number of which are attempting to steer their economies through the transition from Communism to capitalism. Bulgaria, for example, has been losing an estimated \$2 billion a year. The impact on the economies of Western Europe and America has been negligible. The UN refuses to give Bulgaria any compensation.

Sadly the visibility of gypsies and criminals amongst those who have taken advantage since 2007 of Europe's open borders has added yet another negative element to European perceptions of the area - so I have rejected the idea of a Balkan element to the book's title a draft version of which can be accessed at [The Bulgarian Realists - updated edition](#)

But places with traces of older ways of behaviour - let alone the feel of antiquity - are increasingly impossible to find in this homogenised world. When found, of course, they need nurture - not hordes of people tramping the grounds and polluting the atmosphere. So, despite the many attractions of the country, this will not be a book which tries to encourage foreigners to visit special sites - it is rather a book which celebrates people long dead who have, however, left a bit of themselves in the attitudes and tastes of those who now inhabit its country.

Finds I have to report are -

Contemporary Bulgarian Art - Paintings, Graphics and Sculpture ed Svetlin Rusev (Sofia 1982) was a large book I had seen a few years back but was discouraged from buying by the obviously political nature of the selection process. Seeing it again in the little second-hand place on Vasil Levsky corner at Sofia University made me realise that it was a real historical piece which warranted a

place in my library - not least for its glorious reproductions. Its introduction is a stunning paean to the communist party - by the Chairman of the Bulgarian Union of Artists (7 pages which say absolutely nothing).

Rusev still bestrides the art scene these days but must regret the opening page's hymn to September 9th 1944 as well as the obvious omissions eg no mention of the country's most famous aquarellist [Konstantin Shtarkelov](#) (banned and disgraced for his royalism) or the caricaturist Raiko Aleksiev, murdered in prison. The illustrations are still magnificent 33 years later and the whole book is an incredible bit of history (c 400 pages - not numbered)

A new auction house started in Sofia this year and has apparently held 3 auctions - each offering a superb 70 page catalogue. This is [the November one](#) I missed just by a day

Then a visit to Pazardzhik - a small town close to Plovdiv, a gallery I had just become aware of - which is supposed to house more than 2000 paintings donated by one of Pazardzhik's most famous sons, the painter Stoian Vasilev. I could find no sign of them however! The first of the gallery's 2 rooms - with still lives - was bitterly disappointing but things were made up with the portrait room which had a wonderful display of the works of one of Bulgaria's best women artists - [Elisabeth Konsulova-Vaseva](#) as well as delightful examples of many others, including two I had not heard of - local painters Georgi Mashev (1887-1946) and graphic artist Georgi Gerasimov (1905-1977). Although the curator spoke only Bulgarian, she was friendly and pressed several little booklets of these two artists and also about Stoian Vasilev into my hands and wouldn't take any money for them....

My final find was *Catalogue of Graphic Art* (Sofia City Art Gallery 2015) a glorious record of the gallery's graphic collection with a small reproduction of each item - 770 pages bilingual. That's almost 4000 reproductions!!

5 December 2015

Sofia's new galleries

An impressive new gallery has just opened just 100 metres from my flat - the Red Point Gallery - with a display of young Bulgarian graphic artists. With the opening in recent years ago of the [Finesse](#) and [Nuance](#) Galleries in superb buildings in the heart of Sofia and, last autumn of the [Nirvana Gallery](#), a lovely 1920's house, Sofia now boasts an even more inviting choice for artistic exploration. And all within easy walking distance....

Clearly an update is needed of my [2012 post in which I extolled the virtues of the Sofia galleries](#), the more



in

interesting of which I itemized in the little book [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#)
Then I listed 16 galleries - but the latest version of the book [Bulgarian Realists - updated edition](#) has 29 which offer examples of the older tradition in Bulgarian painting.

This makes commentary and comparison all the more challenging - but, owing no favours, I can let rip....

Well-displayed art in a lovely setting may warm one's heart but is not actually my favoured setting for finding art - it signals the curator well down the marketing path with an eye to the higher end of the price market.

I vastly prefer the cluttered spaces of Rumen Manov's Neron gallery (Tsar Samuel 12) and Stefan Stefanov's antique shop (in Tsar Assen 33) - where the promise of a hidden treasure lurks amongst the piles of paintings on the floor.... Valeri Filipov can also offer enticing piles of unframed paintings from the backroom of his impressive new gallery at 11 Vasil Levsky Blvd.

Up until November 2015 I thought [Victoria gallery](#) was Sofia's only auction house but [Enakor](#) gallery (just off Vitosha at the Court of Justice end) started strongly in summer 2015 and held 4 auctions in 2015 - the premises are probably the best Sofia has to offer.... Their online catalogues can be accessed on the link.....

In a way I'm relieved (or my chequebook is) that I've been missing out.....perhaps because they're just starting. Their prices are a bit on the high side - and their sales therefore only about 15% of what's on offer. This is their [November 2015](#) catalogue

The [Loran Gallery](#) at 16 Oborishte St mounts exhibitions every couple of months - focusing on Bulgarian painters from the last century. Their website has a good collection of paintings - a nice feature being the portraits of the 100 or so artists in the list.

Despite the new galleries, however, it is Vihra Pesheva of [Astry Gallery](#) who remains for me Bulgaria's most brilliant impresario of private galleries - singlehandedly seeking out and promoting living artists - young and old - with frequent special exhibitions and materials. Vihra shares her enthusiasm so readily; and I never feel I am imposing when I drop in..... This is [what I said some years](#) ago about the Gallery -

Astry Gallery (under Vihra's tutelage) is unique for me amongst the Sofia galleries in encouraging contemporary Bulgarian painting. Two things are unique - first the frequency of the special exhibitions; but mainly that Vihra follows her passion (not fashion). I am not an art professional - but Vihra has a real art of creating an atmosphere in which people like me can explore the modern scene. I have been to a couple of other exhibition openings here and they were, sadly, full of what I call "pseuds" - people who talked loudly (mostly Embassy people) and had little interest in the paintings (except perhaps their investment value). Vihra and her Astry Gallery attract real people who share her passion and curiosity. It is always a joy to pop in there - and talk to her, visitors, artists and other collectors.

The café scene is by Olga Shishkova (1895-1978)

Monday, March 14, 2016

Friday, April 1, 2016

On resilience; and wines and painters from Pazardzhik



So much happening - the continuing human and political crisis of the ongoing wave of immigration to Europe's shores; [the Panama Papers](#) and its political fallout in Britain - not least on [the Brexit vote](#); the last remnants of the [steel industry being sacrificed in Britain](#) to the neo-liberal God.....and all I do is wallow in self-pity from the facial discomfort of the past 2 months!!

I know our various worlds have always been governed by cycles of gloom and bravado but, somehow, in the past half-century, social

"expectations" seem to have experienced a tectonic shift - such as to have made us incapable of dealing with a world that is in decline....

A few years back, there was [extensive talk of "resilience"](#) - the social capacity to deal effectively with crises....why some communities seem to have this....and others don't. Sad that this concept seems to have gone the way of all fads...Or is it perhaps that we have simply become overwhelmed with the notion of "Crisis"???

Bulgaria is a society which, at first sight, seems to have avoided the temptations of debt-driven modernisation....even in Sofia most people eke out a living - and one-person businesses seem to be the norm. A wine-tasting in young Asen's little [Vina Orrenda](#) (at the Russian Monument) offers a real social occasion in such a modest society and I was glad to have made the trip last Thursday. Not just for the excellent taste of the Riverside range of wines being offered by the [Manistira winery](#) (3 whites; a Rose; and 2 Mavruds) but for the easy conversation which flowed between us. The left part of my face is still semi-frozen and I therefore have problems tasting - but I coped manfully!

It was the first time I had attended a group wine-tasting - and I appreciated the ceremonial aspects as Asen and a young lady first introduced the winery and the wines and Asen then poured us our respective samples...

It was also nice to be approached by one guest and be asked for my opinion on the wines....and to have the chance to speak to the 2 young ladies representing the winery (who remembered me apparently from the November wine-tasting!). It's in a village near Pazardzhik and I suggested they might put Pazardzhik's most famous painter on one of their



etiquettes - **Stoian Vassilev**. He was a prolific painter (the local museum is reputed to have some 5000 of his paintings and sketches). I have 4 of his - the first being very untypical. The second is more typical of his style.....

Sunday, April 10, 2016

[Drawing Back the Veil](#)



Those wanting a sense of how the events of the last century have impacted on the soul of one Balkan country have a unique opportunity in Sofia these next few weeks. Three exhibitions in Sofia offer samples, first, of the paintings of Bulgarians who had the opportunity to study in France in the half-century before the communist takeover of 1944. By definition, those able to avail themselves of such opportunities came from richer families and were therefore often targeted in the immediate aftermath of that takeover. They included figures such as Nikola Tanev, Tseno Todorov and Constantin Shterkelov. The [National Gallery exhibition](#) runs until 30 May.

Sofia City Gallery has an exhibition which some may think overdue called "Forms of Resistance - 1944-1985" with exhibits selected and presented to give a sense of how the world of Bulgarian (and central European) artists dramatically changed as their countries slipped behind the Iron Curtain from 1944. The State Security files (and prison drawings) of Alexander Bozhinov and Alexander Dobrinov (leading caricaturists) and others are a powerful initial exhibit... as are the 3 large industrial landscapes of one of Bulgaria's greatest painters, Nikola Tanev, produced after his release from almost a year in jail. The roll-call of imprisoned or disgraced painters covers Bulgaria's main artistic names - and must have had a devastating effect on the creative spirit.....

The gallery has produced an excellent [video - with the paintings shown from the 4th minute](#)

I first realized the scale of the veil which has been drawn over this subject a few years ago when I was compiling an annotated list of 140 Bulgarian painters for my first booklet.... "[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know the Bulgarians through their art](#)". The caricaturist Rayko Alexiev had died in his first weeks in prison and the superb landscape artist Boris Denev was basically banned for life but, slowly, the internet revealed (with help from google translate!) scraps of information which are not offered in the various catalogues and monographs which the Bulgarian galleries publish.



The Bulgarians, it appears, do not like to discuss this period.....there are still too many skeletons... the belated attempts at [official investigations have been half-hearted](#) - as one would expect when its main political party (BSP) is effectively the old communist party....

The (bi-lingual) text which accompanies the City Gallery's current exhibition is, therefore, for me the first detailed explanation of what exactly happened to artists in Bulgaria - both in the immediate aftermath and as communist power consolidated and evaporated.....

Fascinating to discover that, in the early weeks of the takeover (when the bodies of the murdered political and government elite were still warm), 30 artists were meeting to set up the first Union of Artists - and that Nikola Rainov emerged as its president!

The [Zhendov affair](#) (of 1950) named some 30 deviant painters and led to the dismissal from their academic jobs of painters of the calibre of Ivan Nenov and Kiril Tsonev. Any hint of "mawkish naturalism" was pounced upon as an act of sabotage. A hierarchy of accepted painting led with portrayals of political leaders followed by glorification of labour and liberation. Landscapes were accepted only if, like Tanev's, they showed socialism in action....

As the exhibition recognizes, artists responded in very different ways - some with alacrity, others by turning to other activities, a few with various forms of escape or rebellion....



Not surprisingly in a part of the world in which recent history is strongly disputed, the City Gallery exhibition - which runs until 26 May - has attracted some controversy.

The final exhibition I want to mention is that of Bulgaria's grand old man and doyen of Bulgarian art - **Svetlin Rusev** who is still very active at the age of 83 and whose latest work is on display in the [Seasons Gallery](#) at Krakra St. Rusev is a unique and towering figure - Chairman (1973-85) of the Union of Bulgarian Artists but then fell out of favour with the authorities for his rebellious activities. His position allowed him to build up a fantastic collection of art which he has donated to two [public galleries, one in Pleven](#), the other in Sofia at what used to be his studio very near the Alexander Nevsky Church.

He straddles both the communist and the modern period

Friday, April 15, 2016

Wood, Wine and....Canetti

Sofia detained us for a week and we decided to have a leisurely return (to Bucharest) taking the middle of the three routes which sprout east from Sofia - the quietest and probably most scenic which skirts the edge of the Stara Planina (otherwise known as Blue Mountains).

I had forgotten that this is the road which offers access to the beautiful 19th century village of Koprovitsa (which played such an important role in the 1870s uprising against the Turks) and had no hesitation in veering right to



see it again.....my third visit in the past few years....(the first had been in winter; the second [in autumn 2013](#)). The wood carvings on the doors and ceilings remind me of what an art form wood can be.....RIP Bogdan.....and I realise, rather belatedly, that the superbly carved pulpit is an unusual feature of these older Bulgarian churches - features which are not normally seen in Orthodox churches. The friendly priest who waved us (inc the cat) into the church stressed the ecumenical nature of the congregation in those days..... Dare I wonder that the sermons possibly played a role in the 19th century liberation?????

Karlovo and Kazanluk were on the schedule - the first to check whether any traces were left of the peaceful courtyards of the 1930s which Nicola Taney painted so evocatively; Kazanluk, the heart of the rose valley, for possibly another visit to the municipal gallery which keeps the heart of the Bulgarian painting beating. More than 100 well-known artists grew up in this small town.....

We spotted only a couple of remnants of former architectural splendours in Karlovo - and a sign for the Chateau Copsa winery soon had me distracted from thoughts of art galleries.....

Standing alone in the vineyards stretching to the horizon with the Blue Mountains towering above, the Chateau is a tastefully-created and designed modern building which offers not only wine-tasting and meals but accommodation and sauna....Two superb whites and two great roses were soon trickling down our throats - tempered with chunks of



cheeses, walnuts and dried plums.....all for 6 euros apiece.....one of the most delightful lunches we've had in some time.....

And there was still a couple of hundred kilometres to go before we reached our evening destination - Russe - over the mountains to Veliko Tarnovo and then the final 100 kms.....most of it by now thoroughly familiar.



We pulled in just after 18.00 to the fascinating [Luliaka Hotel](#) plum on the Danube but just within Russe's boundaries.

It's rare for a hotel to attract my loyalty but I so loved the layout, atmosphere and quiet beauty of the site that I quickly booked a second night..... Their meals and house rose (from their own winery) were an added attraction which will draw me whenever I feel I need a restover on my way back from Sofia.....

And Russe has so many attractions - particularly, for us, the early 20th century buildings....I had been looking for the Canetti family house - which the Nobel prizewinner describes in the first part of his memoirs and came across it completely by accident.....pausing to photo parts of the facade and only realising when I was inside that what seemed to be an arts complex was in fact the Canetti Foundation... hosting these days something called a "[Process-Space Art Festival](#)" (this is the statue the municipality recently erected to him at the entrance to his street)

Canetti actually lived in Russe for only a few years before his family migrated to Austria and he subsequently spent most of his life in London and Zurich.

His "[Crowds and Power](#)" was one of many books written by central Europeans which made an impact on me at University and I recently enjoyed his "kiss and tell" [Party in the Blitz](#) which complements his more famous trilogy of memoirs. Clive James does a [demolition job on the man here](#).

A more sympathetic treatment of someone who typified that genre of central European polymath we have sadly lost is [The Worlds of Elias Canetti - centenary essays](#) (2005)

Our second evening we were treated to one of the most spectacular thunderstorms....

8 June



Sofia's Annual Wine Fair

My fourth annual [Bulgarian wine fair this past weekend in Sofia](#) and what a feast if not feat!! More than 200 wines tasted by yours truly in 3 days. And a hugely popular event as you can see from the pics. I'm not prepared these days to pay more than 5 euros for a very good Balkan wine and twelve wineries caught my palate for their "best value" wines. Plus half a dozen old favourites.....I've selected them by Region.....



Danube Region

[Bononia](#) - this was the first year's tasting for this new Vidin vineyard, Their Istar Sauvignon and Traminer were amongst the best - for 5 euros.

[Gulbanis](#) winery is actually nearer Veliko Tarnovo and offers several award-winning whites - particularly the Moscata Bianco 2015, Gewurztraminer and Chardonnay - all for 4 euros

Black Sea

[BOY AR](#) from Pomorie whose Dimyat was only 3 euros.

[Dives winery](#) is also at Pomorie and had a Sauvignon as well as a Muscat and CS rose - all for 4 euros. This was also the price of the Miskets, Pinos Gris and Gruner Veltliners from [Varna Winery](#). The [Zelanos](#) whites from its winery just outside Burgas were a bit pricier at 7 euros



Eastern Thrace

"Angel's estate" wines offer a great SB and Chardonnay for 4 euros

[Domain Marash](#) is near Yambol and offered a lovely Muscat at just under 5 euros; and a tasty CS rose for 5 euros

[villa Yambol](#) had a great Muscat for only 3 euros; and a CS rose for only 2.5 euros!!

Sakar

The [Malkata Zvezda vineyard](#) is in the Rhodopes near the Greek border and offered a Traminer; Chardonnay and Rose each for 5 euros.

Western Thrace

[Karabunar](#) operates near Plovdiv and, in what they called the Bulgarian Heritage Original Collection, offered a Misket; a Dimyat and Mavrud Rose - each for 5 euros....

[Zagreus](#) also has its vineyard near Plovdiv but offers organic wines at great prices - white Mavrud; rose Mavrud at 3.5 euros each ,

Struma Valley

[Zlaten Rozhen](#) has its vineyards at Melnik and its Sandanski Masket has become a favourite of mine (5 euros); at the fair I had my first taste of its Chardonnay and Viognier - also 5 euros

old favourites

[Black Sea Gold](#) - Pentagram, Ponti 3.5 euros

[Ethno](#) - 3 euros

St Ilia (Sliven) - 3.5 euros

Targovishte (centre) - 3.5 euros

[Santa Maria](#) (south-east) - 4/5 euros

Here's [last year's notes](#) by way of comparison.....[and 2013](#)

21 November

Wine Boutiques

Markets are fascinating things - whether its farmers harvesting and distilling grapes and distributing the bottled product to supermarkets and wine boutiques - or artists crafting their materials to delight us in galleries with canvasses or sculptures. All the choices to be made - and the different activities and roles involved in bringing such things as wines and paintings together with customers and clients. Since a cycling trip through France as a teenager, I've always appreciated wines - but been happy until recently to settle for whatever was available cheaply in the nearest shop...

Bulgaria has made me more aware first of the scale of artistic endeavor - the annotated list of Bulgarian artists in the latest edition of [Bulgarian Realists](#) is now almost 300 (without even starting to give serious consideration to contemporary artists!) - and, now, of the scale and variety of its wines... ..

But it's been a gradual process of learning since the first stunning taste of a Targovishte Muscat at Balcik in 2002!

What has helped my education, of course, are the [annual wine fairs here in Sofia](#) - with more than 70 Bulgarian vineyards offering a sample of their wares....almost 500....But even that can be a bit overwhelming....

So I've been delighted to find these days that young Assen's Vinoorendo has been joined by no fewer than 3 other wine shops - first [Rumen's Winebar](#) 52, Alabin St where we had a lovely evening last week tasting 5 of the Santa Maria selection - for 5 euros

Then I stumbled across [Tempus Vini](#) at 81, Tsar Boris - open just 2 months ago and Yassen always poised with an open bottle to welcome us.

And yesterday morning I noticed [Enjoy Wine](#) 19, Ivan Shishman st whose Ivo welcomed us not only with amusing quips but with a couple of tastings. Most of Yassen's wine stock is Bulgarian - and the same is true of Enjoy Wine (which organizes not only wine tastings but trips to vineyards)

If you have money, it's not difficult to part with it in such places - as the owners share their information and passion for the various bottles on offer!

While googling about the idea of wine markets, I came across this [superb blog by a Prof of Political Economy](#) who clearly takes his wines seriously - while making the whole subject of the wine market fascinating.....

Interlude

I had a welcome visit last week from one of my daughters - the reason for my blog silence. A round trip to [Koprivshitsa](#), the old town of [Plovdiv](#) and [Rila Monastery](#) ensued - with a lovely night spent at the [Old Plovdiv Hostel](#) right in the heart of the cobbled old town and a superb meal at the [Hebros restaurant](#) just round the corner.

The highlight however (apart from wine-tasting in Sofia) was our discovery of an amazing junk yard on the road back from Rila - with powerful relics of Bulgaria's recent history....



In March the [post on Mood Music](#) subjected readers to a bibliographical tsunami of texts - which plotted (chronologically) perceptions since the 1950s of the western system of political economy....

Inevitably I missed some important books, the most important of which was probably [Economics and Utopia - why the learning economy is not the end of history](#); by Geoff Hodgson (1999) - the link accesses the complete text.....

It's a clear and tough analysis by a top-class economic historian of why socialism lost its way - and exploration of what it will take for it to restore its energies. If you want to get a sense of the range of arguments which have convulsed economists and activists over the past century, this is the book for you.

April 2017

An Ode to the Palate

After 10 years (this September) of living in Bulgaria (alternately with Romania), I thought I knew my Bulgarian wines - at least the whites to which my metabolism still allows me access.

I had, after all, spent full weekends at the last three of Sofia's most recent annual wine fairs (which take place in November) - and duly swilled, spat and carefully awarded my scores (out of 5.0) in the little note books with which they supply you....

Last year, indeed, I had [posted the results of this courageous endeavor](#)..... making the distinction between my basic favourites (at just over 3 euros) and the new (slightly more expensive) vintages

But that was before I stumbled on the superb little wine-shop [Tempus Vini](#) - opened last autumn. Kallin's in his thirties and will shortly qualify as a sommelier - which shows, since he is the first person I've met in more than five decades of appreciating wine who has actually helped me

understand why I get the variable impressions I do on my palate and throat when I swill, view, smell and then let the liquid first trickle down the back of my teeth.....and into my throat....Quietly, with no pretensions, he offers his various explanations - which have deeply enriched my wine experience..

I've been able to visit KAl(add)in's cave every few days these last few months - each time tasting about three whites, discussing the effects and then moving on to get reasons - and directions for future tastings.....all the while updating my copy of the little [Catalogue of Bulgarian Wines](#) which the KA and TA team produces annually in time for the Sofia wine fair and which carries the details of more than 150 wineries in the country..... Kallin's policy is not to stock the wines found in the supermarkets - but he will happily find and deliver a crate for you - which he did when I recently found an amazing Riesling/Varnenski Misket [from Varna Winery](#) (at 5 euros)

The result has been a delightful educational experience - with the drawback that each year's harvests are always different... (last year's wines began to come into the shop in April) and that I am becoming more daring in buying bottles at 6 euros!!
Remember that Sofia boasts quite a few of these delightful shops where you can buy regional wine in barrels and caskets - for 2 euros a litre! My favourite is one that stocks Karlovo wines - including the famous [Chateau Copsa](#) and its Karlovski Misket

At the beginning of the year I was particularly impressed with the Miskets (particularly Sandanski and Karlovski); then moved on to Muscat; Viognier; Tramin; and Dimiat; discovered the amazing [Macedonian Stobi](#) range; moved back to Moscato Bianco; and cuvees such as Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc. Last week Kallin gave us a presentation of wines from [Malketa Zvezda](#) - the Enigma range
Last night I tried a bottle with a rare blend of Chardonnay (85%) and Tamianka in the Symbiose range produced by [Bratanov winery](#) - from the same (southern) part of the country

Little wonder that when I visited my dentist yesterday, she commented on how happy I looked!

May 2017

PART III – Bulgarian Realist Painting

In which I explain the coup de foudre I experienced in 2008 when I first began to realise the full scale of the fascinating Bulgarian realist painting - which has remained so well hidden from its European neighbours.....Every week I'm in Sofia still brings at least one new name to my attention....(more than a dozen in the week before the November 2015 wine-tasting!) And I haven't even got started on the living artists and the traditions of sculpture, ceramics or wood-carving!

It's not easy to write about painting - so much depends on the viewer and his or her predispositions...But, over time, these can and do change....In the case of Bulgarian art, the language is also a massive obstacle - shortly I explain the process I've used to extract the information generally from the internet although the various resources of the Sofia and Bulgarian galleries has also been very useful. Only at the end of 2014 did I stumble on the amazing resource of the library of the Svetlin Roussev Atelier....

I suspect that, like me, you don't go for the ornate language in which most (but not all) art critics use.....so I've kept the notes simple.

Whatever their bohemian reputation, artists do reflect at least to an extent, the times and places in which they lived.

Their life, as well as their work, has therefore a fascination for me and when, therefore, I encounter some really personal twists to a painter's life I have not hesitated to lengthen the entry...As a result, the length of some of the entries may be felt by some cognoscenti to be unwarranted - put that down to my prejudices as well as the availability of information in English!.

In some cases, I am assured however that information about certain artists is missing even in the Bulgarian language....Bulgaria has, I understand, still to come to terms with the post-war period. As explained in the opening section, a whole class was wiped out in the immediate aftermath of the communist take-over of September 1944 - the speed and scale of the massacres which took place in the months afterwards were unprecedented in the Soviet camp. And artists were part of that class....

I am particularly conscious that the artists producing in the period after the 1960s or so are very badly served in the booklet - as well as those contemporary artists who have not so far made it into my view..... So my apologies to those I have offended....

5. Introducing the Realists

"Very recently a prominent Bulgarian assured me that water colors by the leading Bulgarian artists are second to none in Europe and when I showed some reluctance in accepting so sweeping a judgment, my interlocutor "guaranteed" me that his statement was perfectly accurate and offered to prove it by comparing the best Bulgarian paintings one by one with the best of the contemporary European masters. Being unacquainted with the European masters I accepted the guarantee on faith, though even yet I am a bit doubtful.

Nevertheless, I was very much impressed by the fact that a lawyer, who had given much of his life to politics and was at that moment engaged in trying to improve Bulgarian agriculture, should be so much interested in art".

RH Markham ([Meet Bulgaria](#) 1931)



Plus ça change.....It was only in 2007/08 when I was living and working in Bulgaria for the first time that I stumbled on the landscapes and seascapes painted by the Bulgarian painters who were working in the early and middle of the 20th century. I had the same reaction as Markham all of 75 years earlier (although it is only recently that I came across his comments). I thought the paintings beautiful - and affordable - and have found myself an art collector! Of not only 100 works of the older school in my collection but of various young contemporaries I also admire.

And it wasn't just a question of quality. It was also the sheer number of painters - dead and alive. I had the sense that, pro rata, Bulgarians has more painters, cartoonists and sculptors than other countries.

And yet Bulgarian painters generally (let alone of this particular period) are not well known abroad. Hardly surprising when no book exists (or seems ever to have been published) about Bulgarian painting in the English language.

- A book on "contemporary bulgarian painting" was apparently published in English in 1996 - containing about 14 portraits of key painters but is out of print.
- The incredible Posada art bookshop in Brussels had Europe's largest collection of artbooks and, in 2010, I could find (and buy) there only a 1947 edition of *Art Moderne Bulgare* (French) published by the (then) new Ministry of Culture

I hope this book will help change that. It is written by a complete amateur - someone with absolutely no art training or skills but who, for the past few decades, has always put a visit to the municipal art gallery at the top of his list when visiting the various cities of Europe (and central Asia) - for example

- Berlin in the early 1960s (to discover the pre-war works of Georg Grosz and Kathe Kollwitz and 19th century realists such as Adolf Menzel);

- Brussels in the mid 1980s (to be moved by the 16th century Flemish art - and late 19th century realists);
- Istanbul in the late 1980s (and the delight of their miniaturists and calligraphists)
- the stunning Hermitage in Leningrad in January 1991 (the Russian Itinerants); and
- Tashkent in the early 2000s (for the Asian side of Soviet art).

Of course most of these paintings are figurative whereas what I initially fell in love with here in Bulgaria are the paintings of their land- and sea- scape artists. Perhaps that it nostalgia for my home country, Scotland, which I left 20 years ago - and the glorious landscapes painted in Victorian times by people like John Knox and William MacTaggart and, in the early part of the 20th century by the Glasgow Boys and Colourists.

I have lived in Sofia on and off since summer 2007; have a mountain house in the Romanian Carpathians; and blog regularly - not least about Bulgarian paintings. I do therefore have some terms of comparison - which strengthen my conviction that Bulgaria has something very special to offer the visitor.

This does not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to the painters who have been active in Bulgaria in the past 100 years. There are so many painters that that would be a difficult task even for a Bulgarian! Its purpose is rather

- to give a sense of what "realist" Bulgarian painters of the 20th century have to offer
- to encourage visitors to Bulgaria to visit both the private and municipal art galleries - where, as a foreigner, you are generally received as a VIP;
- and to inspire you to make your own discoveries and purchases.

The list of painters therefore goes far beyond that of the well known painters - Zlatyu Boiadjiev; Vladimir Dimitrova (Maistora); Ivan Mrkvichka, Nikola Petrov; Benko Obrshekov; Nikola Taney; Jaroslav Vesin, and Mario Zhekov, for example, whose names you should certainly have memorised if you wish to impress the dealers. You will not be able to afford their prices - but mentioning them will certainly establish your credibility!

My selection criteria are beauty and "affordability" - and the list includes therefore artists who would not necessarily be rated by art critics.

Bulgarian art, as Markham recognised in 1931, is a comparatively new creation — almost as new as the state itself (1878).

"To be sure, there were ikon paintings of a rather high order a hundred years ago. Likewise, a number of first rate artists appeared even before the liberation, at the same time that the awakening nation was beginning to print books and papers, to give theatrical performances and to insist on having mass sung in their own language. Yet practically all the art productions worth mentioning have been created since the nation won its freedom".

Perhaps this is one of the things which accounts for the freshness of its paintings in the early decades of the 20th Century.

This book lists some 200 painters from the early part of the 20th century and tries, in a few lines, to capture their significance. This wasn't easy - I first have to put the artist's name in Cyrillic script and then copy and paste on Bulgarian google - then google translate what seem to be promising entries. Then there is the problem that these give the barest facts (except long lists of exhibitions and honours which add not a jot to our understanding of the person!) And it goes without saying that most art "criticism" is gobbledegook...

Paintings speak in different ways to each of us - although that doesn't stop art critics and historians from imposing a lot of words and noise on us.

I don't know about you - but, whenever I see a painting which I like, I always want to know something about the painter. Where did (s)he grow up? Where were they trained? What were the defining inspirations and influences - eg friends?

I am, for example, very fond of [Gregor Naidenov's aquarelles of café life](#) in Sofia in the 1930-1950s - but, so far, have been unable to find out anything about the man.

But I was impressed with a book on Boris Denev which included lovely black and white photographs of him with friends and in various studios and exhibitions....also a recent book on a [classic Bulgarian photographer, Stoyan Sertev](#) which not only reproduced many of the old photographs (including lovely ones of Nicola Taney) but included a CD of the quartet he led (see section 3.7).

I have [a growing library of art books](#) both from that period and contemporary - and the silences and gaps in these books (at least the English sections) speak volumes.....

As, indeed, I sorted them for the bookshelves of the 1930s flat I now have in old Sofia (photo), I began to have the feeling that I was living amongst those who had departed this life.....but who had left marvellous memories..... and were in that sense still alive.....

And Bulgaria is particularly interesting for the art lover since it was under Communist rule for 45 years - and the artist played an important (but difficult) role in communist regimes. Bulgaria had a fair number of leftist political caricaturists in the first half of the century - who might have been expected to welcome the advent of a more progressive regime. Some flourished - others suffered. One, Rayko Aleksiev, was imprisoned and quickly died under suspicious circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the communist takeover. Painters who did not toe the official line had simple choices - migration (geographical or professional); banishment or compromise. Many painters chose to go into theatre design or cinema. Some, like Boris Denev, Konstantin Shtarkelov and Nikolai Boiadjev, found themselves banned from painting - let alone exhibiting.

Maria Vassileva - Chief Curator of the wonderful Sofia City Gallery - gives an excellent introduction to Bulgarian painting on [the Gallery's website](#).



This, in my view, is best read after you have seen a few of the paintings - but these excerpts identify some of the key figures -

The earliest post-Liberation artists (Ivan Mrkvichka, Anton Mitov, Jaroslav Vešin, and Ivan Anghelov) bear testimony to the changes in Bulgarian painting that were setting in during this period. The individual human being was no longer at the centre of the artist's quests. These were directed towards the depiction of the real world with all its variety and tangible concreteness. The people's way of life was considered a sign of fidelity to the national cause suited to keep up the spirits of the people. ...The landscape plays nearly as important a part as the human figures. These canvases belong to the earliest attempts at plein air painting. The artist is fascinated by the effects of sunlight, the transparency of the air, the play of shadows cast by the trees. While the figures are depicted with meticulous accuracy, the landscape setting is distinguished by a certain ethereal quality, sketchiness of treatment and luminosity. The same is true of Ivan Mrkvichka's *Going to Market*, one of his classical genre paintings, in which the artist's attention is focused on the subject-matter and the costume of the central character, but no less on the winter landscape, which envelops the scene and occupies the greater part of the canvas.....

Besides genre painting, portraiture continued to evolve as a favoured art form. Both Mrkvichka and Mitov have painted portraits; Mitov's *Self-portrait* is a widely known work....

The earliest serious attempts to break away from the old academic line in painting date from the early twentieth century. The founding of the *Savremenno Izkoustvo* (Contemporary Art) Society in 1903-4 was an expression precisely of these trends characterized by the interest not only in subject-matter but also in plastic values and by the desire to apply certain of the lessons of West-European painting. Nikola Mihailov, Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, Nikola Petrov, Elena Karamihailova rank among the notable artists of this period.

Most of the younger Bulgarian landscape painters were pupils of Jaroslav Vešin and developed further his achievements.

The most significant development during this period was the definite breaking away from academism and the increasingly strong and fruitful influence of Impressionism, which affected most Bulgarian artists to a higher or lesser degree - Nikola Petrov, Yordan Kyuvliev, Nikola Tanev, Assen Belkovski, Konstantin Shturkelov, Alexander Moutafov, Atanas Mihov, Marin Georgiev-Oustagenov, Vladimir Dimitrov-Chiraka, Peter Morozov.

Elissaveta Konsoulova-Vazova and Elena Karamihailova have created a gallery of intimate and psychologically penetrating portraits. Having both received their academic training abroad, these two women artists had not only a rich artistic career, but also exerted a considerable impact on the development of painting during the first half of the century. Their works evidence the mixed influences of German Romanticism and German Impressionism.

Vassileva's list contains the "top 20" as it were of the early period - ie those born in the last part of the 19th century. Mihov, Moutafov and Tanev are three of my favourites - although I'm not able to afford a Tanev. But I would certainly have included Boris Denev - of one of whose 1935 paintings I proudly acquired recently (this is a great painting of Plovdiv which will be European City of Culture in 2019).

Other artists whose names I would include in my roll-call of honour are Nenko Balkanski, Vasil Barakov, Nikola Boiadjiev, Zlatyu Boiadjiev, Dobre Dobrev, Kolyo Kolev, Christo Kriskaretz, Vera Lukova, Kiril Mateev, Grigor Naidenov, Ilyia Petrov, Christo Rubev, Stanio Stam-atov, Boris Stefchev, Kiril Tsonev, Ivan Trichkov, Stoian Vasilev, Mario Zhekov and, of course, such satirists as Ilyia Beshkov and Stoian Venev.

6. What's in a Name?

I realise it is difficult to classify painters - many are versatile; or change their style over time; and I don't want to use terms which baffle (eg post-impressionist).

This is a book about the painting style I like - and the word for that seems to be "**realism**" - the style which tries to portray a likeness rather than an abstraction (and that includes caricaturists and impressionists). I don't therefore include the traditional religious art. Realism includes -

- urban and rural landscape
- seascape
- Figurative (includes portraits)
- Graphic - particularly satire
- Still life

Books and articles about art are very confusing for someone who comes fresh to the subject from a life of doing other things.....A lot of the writing is, for me, pretentious guff.....exceptions being those (for example [Paul Johnson's Art; a New History](#)) who were not trained in art but developed an idiosyncratic passion..... [John Berger](#) is another "original" who offers challenging insights about painters.....

And, curiously, what is called "[Modern art](#)" is actually quite old - covering in most accounts the century from 1880. Logically what followed should be known as "[post-modern](#)" - but, unlike the literary world, this is not a term which finds great favour amongst art critics.

"Contemporary art" seems to cover the work of living and fashionable artists.....I confess that I shudder a bit when I hear the phrase "contemporary art" - there is so much that is hypocritical, crass and materialistic if not downright cynical and duplicitous about the way "western" art galleries (and some famous "artists") operate that I am sometimes feel a bit guilty to find myself on the edges of this circle made up of the diverse groups of artists, galleries, art critics, "art collectors"and art dealers....the latter being the conduit for the money which accumulates these days in the hands of such dubious plutocrats.....

Bulgarian art, I am glad to say, is not like that - and I count both gallery owners and artists here amongst my best friends.....

I don't pretend to be an art historian or critic; the writings of Bulgarian art historians are not translated into English; and the brief notes you will find in the larger books on Bulgarian Art you can find in the Sofia City Gallery; the National Gallery or the bookshops mentioned in section 3.3 above (even if in English) will rarely tell you very much!

I realise that my focus on *older modern art* (broadly until the 1950s) excludes significant strands of Bulgarian painting - eg the rich tradition of icon paintings); the abstract and expressionist works which were to be found in abundance in the *communist period* particularly after the mid 1970s; and post 1989 (*contemporary*).

Those interested in contemporary art can find the work of more than 200 on this [Modern Bulgarian Artists](#) website - although two of my favourites Milcho Kostadinov and Yuliana Sotirova are not on the list.

There is an even larger list of artists on the [Bulgarian Fine Arts website](#)

The [\(rather curious\) Art Domino site](#) gives a list of what seems to be mainly contemporary painters whose work can be seen in galleries here.....

And I found this E-book [Bulgarian Artists in Vienna - contemporary practices at the beginning of the 21st Century](#) - as well as this feature [Focus Bulgaria 2015](#)

There are also no less than two Museums of Contemporary Art - in Sofia but when I tried to visit them (in Feb 2015) they were both closed!!

Some interesting Contemporary artists

My interest in (and purchase of) contemporary paintings is fitful - and I do not haunt the contemporary galleries as I do the above ones. So I do not even attempt to list here the (many) small galleries concentrating on contemporary arts which are to be found in Sofia - there are several Tourist Centres which generally have simple maps of Sofia which list some such galleries... But these are some of the artists whose work I like

Name	Style/technique	Can be seen
Atanassova, Natasha	bucolic	Astry Gallery
Bekiarov, Andrian	Aquarelle; hyper realist; some surreal	Absinthe Gallery
Bogdanova, Maria	Oil; Magic realism	Rita's Gallery
Gazdov Ivan	Graphicature	
Golev Yassen	Oil surreal Hyper--realist still-life aquarelles	Konus Gallery
Kostadinov, Milcho	Oil impressionist, portraits, landscapes	Astry Gallery
Matsoureff, Atanas	Aquarelle; hyperrealist	Absinthe Gallery https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymfONYwfwuU https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfP5T19J1kM https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7bNj8r-xrU
Minkova, Angela	Wry humour	
Raicheva, Maria	Oil impressionist, landscape	Astry Gallery
Sabit, Mesrur	Oil, landscape	Astry Gallery

Sotirova, Yuliana	Oil realist	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-br4AYT5wIo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvKEfAegLu8
Tiholov, Nikola	Dreamlike with detailed patterns on buildings	Astry Gallery
Todorov, Tony	Dream surreal	Astry Gallery
Yovchev, Jovo	Expressionist	Konus Gallery
Sculpture		
Dermendjiev, Spartak (Paris)	Portraits/busts Horses; bulls Erotica (cynical)	www.spartakdermendjiev.com/ http://parissculpture.wordpress.com/ http://parisportreti.wordpress.com/ http://parisbg1.wordpress.com/ http://www.youtube.com/user/parisbg1?blend=1&ob=video-mustangbase

7. Getting to see the richness of Bulgarian art

7.1 Sofia

The National Gallery is worth a visit - although its exhibited collection is not very large and it never seems to circulate the paintings. Things changed in summer 2015 with the opening then of a large complex next to the Art Academy and National Library on Vassil Levsky Boulevard at the University. In the meantime, [its website](#) continues to disappoint

The Atelier Svetlin Roussev is a must-visit - near the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral at the top of 11th August St.

The [City Art Gallery](#) across from the National Gallery is smaller but very imaginatively run

And the Shipka St gallery of the [Union of Bulgarian Artists](#) is a must for any artlover's schedule - which it took me several years to appreciate. Just behind the National Library and next to the University, its four floors of gallery space are generally full of interesting stuff **and is the only place** you can access all the posters for current exhibitions. Miss it - and you will miss some important exhibitions somewhere in Sofia. last visit offered me not only the annual exhibition of Bulgarian cartoonists but a sample of the work of one of the Russe school of painting, [Vasilka Moneva](#)

One of the many delights of Sofia is the profusion of its small, friendly galleries in the centre - the majority displaying modern art but a handful concentrating on the mid 20th century artists who are the focus of this booklet. If you are serious in your search for particular artists, most of the owners will be able, in a day or so, to let you have a look at some which are on the market. The Annexes gives all the detail...

7.2 The regional municipal galleries

Bulgaria has an excellent network of municipal art galleries, details of which are given in the Annex. All operate under tight budget conditions - which means that few can even afford heating in the winter. But, as a foreigner, you will receive a very warm reception (well if its winter, not quite) in the regional galleries - each of which has its own local painting heroes.

7.3 Sofia City Gallery - a case study

The special exhibitions of Sofia City Art Gallery play an important role in Bulgaria in bringing together the paintings of people like Dobre Dobrev, Nikolae Boiadjev (to mention 2 recent events) from the various municipal and private museums in the country. But the Sofia gallery has a large collection of Bulgarian art (3,500 pieces) and how therefore to ensure that they see the light of day?

In 2010, the Gallery curator Dr. Maria Vasileva started a series ("The other Eye") to overcome the problem - which consists of inviting outsiders to comb the dungeons of the gallery where the collections are stored, strip off the protective covering and select some paintings.

I just missed the first two exhibitions of such works - selected by an artist Luchezar Boyadjiev and a philosopher Boyan Manchev. The small booklet which accompanied the second exhibition tells of Boyadjiev expecting to find a large section of the museum's collection covering major events - whether historical or personal). Instead "the representation of various aspects of people's private world obviously prevails, there being, conditionally speaking, an "idyllic" thread running through the works, which unifies all those aspects through the representation of elements of everyday living, which are not directly related to either big moments in history and monumental events, or to essential existential and metaphysical issues such as life, death, birth, violence, suffering, etc."

The third exhibition was of artefacts selected by 43 prominent Bulgarian art and cultural historians belonging to different generations and fields of work (lecturers, researchers, museum curators, directors of art galleries, museums and nongovernmental organizations, art critics, curators and freelance researchers.

7.4 Auction Houses

Up until the end of 2015 I thought there was only one auction house - Victoria Gallery. But I have just discovered another which seems to be holding more frequent auctions - [Enakor](#) - and who publish online catalogues.....In a way I'm relieved (or my chequebook is) that I've been missing out..... This their [November 2015 edition](#)

8. Resources on Bulgarian Painting and Painters

This section is for those whose appetite has been whetted so far - and lists some of the more substantial books which are available.

Five great sources are **freely available to download** on the internet -

- [Socialist construction in the work of Bulgarian artists](#) (Sofia 1954)
- [Iliya Beshkov 1901-1958](#) (2006) - to mark the 105th anniversary of the birthday of Bulgaria's master caricaturist, Pleven Art Gallery (named in Beshkov's honour) published this lovely little book
- [The Art Collection of the National Bank of Bulgaria](#) (2009) 143 pages of beautiful illustrations
- [The Treasures of Varna City Art Gallery](#) (2013) - all 136 pages of superb reproductions.
- [Kazanlak Art Gallery's](#) offerings (don't be put off by the strange list which initially confronts you!)

I leave the reader to decide how this recent discovery - "[Bulgarian Artists in Vienna](#) - contemporary practices at the beginning of the 21st Century" - compares. It is a 212 page electronic book whose pages can be flicked

Three books which give a great overview of the tradition of Bulgarian painting of the 20th Century can be bought here in Sofia are -

- [A Possible History - Bulgarian art through the collection of Sofia City ArtGallery](#) . It's 200 pages of material well organised into the various time-periods with appropriate selections of reproductions and short Dimitar Gachev (bilingual) intros to each period - costs 25 leva
- Last year the Bulgarian Union of Artists gave us a curious 350 pages (in English) - [Bulgarian Art - 120 Years](#) (2013) with 350 pages and costing a whopping 120 leva. It's a history of the various artistic associations - with reproductions - but gives absolutely no information about the individual artists. The text gives technical and very boring details of the various splits which occurred - with no attempt made to explain the significance or reasons for the changes.
- The Academy of Art recently offered a marvellous catalogue to accompany its current, rather small, exhibition of some of the items from its extensive archives - *Painting Collection (1896-1940)* (Museum Collection of the National Academy of Art) (2014) It's 190 full page reproductions with a very short and general (bilingual) introduction and costs a very reasonable 25 leva.

But the one problem with all of these publications is that virtually no information is given about the individual artists (in whatever language). Other, very good and substantial, catalogues are -

- *The Stara Zagora municipal gallery collection* (2007) - about 200 pages with nice outlines of the artists (including a short English summary)
- *Bulgarian artists and Munich* (City Gallery 2009) - German and Bulgarian
- *The Association of New Artists 1931-1944* (Sofia City Gallery 2012) - with short (bilingual) summaries of the artists
- *Sofia City Art Gallery's Catalogue* (2003) - almost 700 pages of postage-size black and white reproductions and brief bilingual blurbs about the artists. Now I think out of print

(although they it's accessible online - see below - and recently published a great Catalogue of their graphic collection)-

- *Studio-collection Svetlin Roussev* - stunning 200 page catalogue of the collection of Bulgaria's Eminence Gris of art which he acquired in his long stint as Chairman of the Bulgarian Union of Artists in the 1970s...

Those who read Bulgarian can access a large Dictionary of Bulgarian artists which was produced some decades ago but there does not seem to be a introduction to Bulgarian art for the generalist (even Bulgarian) who wants to know something about the life of the artists - including how they dealt with communism. *The question, of course, is what exactly does information about an artist's life add to our appreciation of his/her actual output* - be it a novel, painting or [piece of music](#)?

Most people would argue for a separation of the works from the life. One can (like Brecht or Dali) be a bit obnoxious as a person but still admirable as an artist.



But I certainly enjoy biographies such as the recent one by Hilary Spurling of [Matisse](#) for the light they throw on the choices artists make or the influence of family and friends. The book on Matisse, for example, helped me understand his use of bright colours - they were the surroundings of his daily life as he grew up in a Belgian silk town!

And I particularly value the black and white photographs of the artists - whether in streets or in their studios..... here, for example, is the striking figure of the "Master" of Bulgarian painting - Vladimir Dimitrov.....

Websites for older realist artists

Two auction websites have excellent archives of paintings. These are [ArtPrice.BG](#) and the [Victoria gallery](#) in Sofia. But be aware that the Bulgarian habit is to list by first name - not family name! And, although they give useful information on price, there is little information about the artists themselves.

- The [website of Sofia City Art Gallery](#) has an excellent overview of Bulgarian painting - which I have already mentioned. It also stores information on each special exhibition it has held since 2001 - and this proved an excellent source of detailed information on a few artists. Almost 3000 small black and white reproductions of the Socia City Gallery collection can be accessed at <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola0> (a-K); <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola1>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola2>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola3> (Mi-N); <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola4>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola5>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola7>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola8>
- The **Loran Gallery** in Sofia has a webpage with [self-portraits of a lot of artists](#) - a nice little feature when it's so difficult to read as much about their lives as you might wish to....

- The delightful (private) [Phillipopolis Gallery in old Plovdiv also has a website](#) with a small archive of painting. It's housed in a glorious old house in old Plovdiv.
- **Varna Art Gallery** also has [a website](#)
- The lovely modern **Razgrad gallery** also has a [great \(bilingual\) Catalogue](#)
- The **Nuance Gallery** in Sofia has now developed [a useful set of annotated notes](#) about key artists - classic and contemporary
- The [Kavalet Gallery](#) is an internet resource which seems to have a base in Varna.

Apart from the intro on the Sofia City art gallery, I have been able so far to find only three articles in English about Bulgarian painting -

- a rather academic piece ([Images of Modernity](#)) about developments at the turn of the 19th century and early 20th;
- a [charming chapter of Markham's 1931 book](#); and, finally,
- this nice piece on [8 famous Bulgarian illustrators](#).

A recent discovery for me was the website [Bulgarian Art](#) which was formed by "a group of journalists, art historians, artists and collectors to fill the huge vacuum in the Internet space which is Bulgarian art". Sadly it never seems to have developed.....

Annex 4 lists more than 100 books about individual Bulgarian artists which I have been able to pick up from various places (not least the antique shops) and which are now part of a growing library I have on the subject.

The quotation which heads chapter 6 is from the 1931 book by an American journalist based in Sofia makes the point of how impressed he was by the fact that a busy lawyer active in politics should be so interested in art....but I think it's in the Bulgarian blood.....

Even present-day young people, I find, know the names of long-dead Bulgarian artists..... painting, sculpture, ceramics.....there seem more artists per head of the population than in most other countries.....

And certainly they seem to produce more books about painters.....

Serious bibliophiles should visit the Atelier Svetlin Roussev on Vratska St just beneath the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral which, in addition to the fascinating collection, has a great art library.

9. An Annotated List - shock and awe the gallerists!

The first edition of [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#) listed some 140 painters who had come to my notice - the intervening three years or so has allowed me to add another 60 names. And every few weeks I will come across another painter whose name deserves a place.....

In the following list, I try to say something about -

- Date and place of birth - and year of death
- Where they trained - sometimes under which artists
- Genre
- Main places of work - and influences (such as close artist friends and/or membership of Associations of artists)
- Price

It has not been easy to get this information - usually it has meant a tortuous process of getting the Cyrillic name of the artist from the google translate and then copying that into the Bulgarian google search engine. My automatic translate then gives me an immediate translation - most of which I have then edited down for the list. My apologies for the residuals left of the original..... let alone the different styles of the entries....

With the 50 pages which follow in your hand as you visit Bulgaria's galleries, you will amaze their curators with the breadth and depth of your knowledge; establish yourself as a worthy customer; and, who knows, by virtue of that fact negotiate a chunk off the asking prices.....

Note on Listing and Spelling;

Three problems confront any non-Bulgarian when making a list -

- The Cyrillic alphabet has more letters than ours and the order of the letters in the Bulgarian ([or Russian](#)) language is not the same as "romantic" languages. For example they have 2 "B"s, the second of which is actually pronounced V. This makes the listing of artists' names confusing for English speakers.
- Bulgarian lists are also confusing since the list is often constructed using the first rather than the family name. This apparently (and curiously) started after 1944 in an attempt to differentiate the various members of the same family name.....
- The final difficulty is what is called the "[transliteration](#)" problem - there are actually different ways in which the English equivalent of the Bulgarian name can be constructed since the vowel we would expect is often missing from the cyrillic. Take the artist Shtrkelov - or should it be Shturkeloff....or Shtrkeloff...?

-

Note on terminology; the "State Drawing School" was opened in Sofia in 1896. In 1908 it is renamed "The State Industrial School of the Fine Arts" which changed, in 1921, to "The State Academy of Fine Arts". In 1954 it changed again to - "The Higher Institute of Fine Arts Nikolay Pavlovitch". In 1996 it was declared by government decree as "The National Academy of Art". To avoid confusion (and following the Scottish tradition) I have often shortened the name to Sofia School of Art.

200 (and more) of the best - gaining the dealers' attention!

Artist	Dates	Focus	Location of birth, training; genre; some recent prices
Abadjiev Petko	1913-2004	Landscapes	Born in Karlovo. Colleague of Nikola Tanev, one of Bulgari's "greats", and, like him, a superb colourist. When only 12 soent time with his mother in prisonat Troyan in retribution for the September 1923 communist uprising 1937 started at Sofia Art School Graduated 1942 under Ganoushev He paints scenes from Karlovo, Plovdiv and the Black Sea http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=113 A nice painting of his went unsold at a recent Victoria auction - reserve price 325 euros
Alsheh, Eliezer	1908-1983	landscape, portrait	Born Vidin. Graduated 1933 from the Sofia School of Art. His first exhibition in Sofia in 1934 caused some outrage for its "pictorial boldness" - but he was supported by other artists such as Kiril Tsonev. Worked for some time as a house-painter in Palestine but came back to a second, much more successful exhibition in Sofia - the proceeds of which allowed him to spend 3 months in Paris. Spent only 10 years in BG - some in concentration camp. The new communist regime was hostile to his work and he emigrated in 1951 to Argentina
Alekov, Napoleon	1912-2002	seascapes	born Tulcea, Romania and came to Bulgaria at age 2. A prolific painter, he apparently left about 10,000 paintings and had 25 exhibitions. http://artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=506 http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=140 from 300 euros

Aleksiev, Raiko

1893-1944

Caricaturist; essayist; art critic

born in Pazardzhik into the family of Bulgarian refugees from Thessaloniki. He studied literature at Sofia University and painting at the Art Academy in Sofia.

With the release of his first landscape "Exhibition of Young" in 1913, the second wife of King Ferdinand became the greatest admirers of his talent. That same year the artist made five solo exhibitions.



In 1932, he founded the weekly newspaper "Cricket" doing all the cartoons himself. Wrote articles feuilleton and humorous miniatures, taking responsibility also for distribution, It was written in the home of the artist to the latest issue of September 8, 1944 a circulation of 50 thousand. In all 12 years keeps him at the forefront of home

publications - cartoonists Elijah Beshkov and Stoyan Venev were its regular employees.

As longtime chairman of the Union of the artists Rayko Alexiev managed to get the Ministry of Finance 2 million. Lev, which saved the families of many freelance artists evacuated in different villages of the country from starvation. But because of his caricatures of Stalin he is, after the September 1944 communist takeover, alleged to be an enemy of the people, thrown into prison and beaten to death in November 1944 immediately after the coup d'état

In March 1945 he was sentenced posthumously for "anti-Soviet" and "pro-German" propaganda of the so-called. "People's Court" in the famous Case №6, which are defendants in 101 writers, artists, journalists, including some already dead.

"I am not a politician. I have shown the errors of politicians, I deride the harm some politicians are doing to people. I have no money abroad. I regularly paid taxes. Everyone I borrow and I gave with both hands. I'm not a rat - to leave a sinking ship."

The sculpture is one of him by my friend Spartak Dermendjiev

Alexandrov Zdravko



1911-1999

Landscape

Born Mokresh, Lom.

Master of rural and industrial landscapes. Graduated from Sofia Art School in 1935 - under Professor Zahariev. Three years later, presents his first solo exhibition - the fruit of a year's work in Smolyan and Raikovo.

Inspired by the awesome beauty

and majesty of the mountains, these early works already reveal his creative gifts

Recent large painting 50x70 went unsold at reduced price of 1,300 euros

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=96>



Angeloushev Boris	1902-1966	graphic	Born and grew up in Plovdiv; trained in Berlin Art Academy in the early 1920s and was clearly influenced by the revolutionary events taking place then and by the powerful graphics of Kathe Kollwitz. Returned to Bulgaria in 1935. For some examples, see http://www.gallery-victoria.com possible to get sketch for 200 euros
Anghelov, Ivan	1864-1924	Landscape, historical	Born Brestnica. 1882-86 Munich Art Academy. 1888/89 studied in Rome before returning to teach in Sliven and Plovdiv until 1890. Then teacher at the newly opened State Drawing School in Sofia. Exhibited extensively in Europe Made large impact in the period. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=7240

Arashev, Nikola	1895-1984	Landscape portrait Still life	Born Stara Zagora Graduated Sofia Art School 1927 under N Marinov and T Todorov Member of Assoc of New Artists teacher at Sofia Art School for many years http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=340
Atanasov, Georgi	1874-1950	landscape	Born Belozem, nr Plovdiv One of Vesin's pupils in 1902 1909 Munich art academy and then teacher at Haskovo before taking part in the Balkan wars and1 the First WW
Atanasova, Sidonya	1909-	Superb graphic artist	Born Vratsa in the family of Lieutenant General Iliya Atanasov and teacher Rayna Atanasova. In 1911 the family moved to Belogradchik. (In 1982 Sidonia Atanasova said she stay in her early childhood in this city helped "to form a more vivid imagination with its surroundings and strange rock nature.") In 1915, the family of General Atanasov settled in Pleven where in 1929 Sidonia Atanasova graduated actual school. On October 1, 1930 she was a student at the State Art Academy in Sofia. Admission to the academy, she noted as "interesting episode" in her life who said: "In 1930, under the influence of my girlfriend went to Sofia to follow the Music Academy. But due to unforeseen coincidence missed the deadline of the competition. Then I decided to sit for the competitive examination of the Art Academy, which was held two days later. Exam endured very well (without training) and joined the Department of decorative art. " The course of her training in " Decorative Arts " with professors Nicolas Kozuharov, Vassil Zahariev, Nikolai Raynov (art history) and Stoyan Raynov (ceramics). During those years she studied optional graphics prof. Vassil Zahariev. She graduated from the Academy of June 28, 1936 with success very good. Following years of teaching: in Girls' High School in Pazardjik -1939 g .; in Male High School in Dupnitsa - 1941 .; Mixed School in Razgrad - 1942 Girls' High School in Lovech - 1943 and the end of 1943 to July 1946 - Pleven. 1936 marks the beginning of the presence of Sidonia Atanasova the national artistic life. Modestly notes participation in XII and XIII-th exhibition of the Society of independent artists, 1936 and 1937 "two works", adding: "and in all national exhibitions without omission in the town. Sofia from 1937 to 1981 two or three carvings ... " and as a summary of their career, Sidonia Atanasova concludes:" In his work I try not to be influenced neither ours nor foreign artists and to create your own style. " http://www.art-pleven.com/izlojbi/sidoniaAtanasova100g.htm
Atanasova, Venetka	1905-1980		http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=316

Balkanski Nenko 1907 -1977 Figurative; landscapes Born Kazanluk. graduated from Sofia Art School in 1930. He then went to study in Germany, France and later Italy. He seems to have been a modest man and his portrayals of family life were well regarded by the socialist authorities who used his work on stamps. A large still life of his is priced at 3,000 euros in a recent auction.			
			
Balkanski, Pencho	1908-1985	Photographer and Landscape painter	Born Lovets, Troyan area In 1923 comes to Sofia School of Art and works in photographic studio of his brother. In 1930 has his first photo exhibition with portraits of Tzvetana Tabakova. His photo lab 'Luna' is a legend - he's an inspired entertainer in all genres, in which works - paintings, graphics, photography. In 1936 he had photographic exhibitions in Vienna. friends are David Perez, George Papazov, Vasil Ivanov, Nayden Petkov, Georgi Velchev, Daniel Dechev In 1958, his work was declared unacceptable and he left for Vienna and Paris where he met friends such as Peretz, Nayden Petkov In 1978, seventy-year old anniversary makes a retrospective exhibition featuring works from the last three decades. expect to pay almost 1,000 euros
Banchev, Iakim 1884-1967 Portrait, war, landscape graphic Born Lovech - secondary school in Gabrovo, where he was friends with Georgi Mitov (brother of Anton Mitov (and a graduate of the Academy in Turin), then to Sofia, where February 18, 1903 was admitted to the National School of Drawing in the studio painting of Ivan Markvichka and Ivan Angelov. Autumn of the same year he was part of the student flow to the Art Academy in Dresden, where he stays until March 1904. When he goes to Turin. This is his last stop - at least for the next five years. Graduated (1905) painting at the Art Academy in Turin (Italy). As a student takes part in an exhibition in Turin			

(1905) with his work "Nude" and received First Prize (the picture is located in the Turin Museum).



Returned to his native Lovech. Brought with him his paintings from his workshops in the academies, today a significant portion of it is lost. A few of his paintings are purchased in the early 50s by Sofia City Gallery, Military archives gives us information on the involvement of travelers in the Balkan War in 1913, as well as mobilization, and its inclusion in the ranks of the seventeenth Infantry Regiment during the First World War. It is in these troubled years formed his second great creative period, which creates dozens of large-scale canvasses immortalized horror of war (now part of the collection of the Museum of Military History in Sofia).

Took part in two organized exhibitions with his paintings of military subjects, he attempted to become involved directly in organized artistic life in the country. At the end of 1919 is part of the initiative group of the Society of Independent Artists, of which, however, never became a member nor even took part in its first exhibition.

Not find a place for himself in his homeland, he made a decisive move and headed across the Atlantic, where dreams can be realized as an architect. Shouldering a small suitcase and a modest folder with drawings, he migrated alone in July 1923 and settled in Manhattan. His hopes to find work as an architect quickly evaporate.

Forced to go back to his painting, he earns enough money to return to his beloved Mina. But in 1925, financial difficulties and problems in the family back home in Bulgaria, which two years later force him to leave again, but this time without great expectations.

In the period from July 1927 to July 1933 Bancheva family lives in the US and the amount of savings made portraits allowed him to return to BG and buy in Sofia a property at 5a "August 11" St (just below the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and across the road from the Atelier Svetlin Roussev).

He designed his own studio on the top floor of the same building

In his remaining more than three decades of life Jakim Banchev he worked in the pharmaceutical office of his brother Ivan. After Sept 1944 he withdrew from artistic work for fear of the consequences of his bourgeois past. Despite attempts after the political changes in the country to adapt and to participate in exhibitions, his works were never exhibited. "As a kind of reward for his modest nature, UBA accepts one work in 1949 but doesn't display it. He sank into the solitude of his own studio, where he painted and then destroyed the works to avoid trouble - Sometimes doing portraits on order for a ministerial office with pictures of Botev, Levski Georgi Dimitrov. Portraits not signed. Jakim Banchev meets death on the doorstep of his home on January 19, 1967".

There was a short TV programme tribute about the [exhibition which runs at the Emanouilva Gallery 2014/2015](#)

Barakov Vasil

1902-1990 landscape

born Kazanluk. - and graduated from the State Academy of Arts in 1935. Part of a group consisting of David Peretz, himself and Zlatyu Boaidjiev (and inspired by the older Dechev and Lavrenov) known as BARATZI and who later became known as "the Plovdiv school".

He seems to have been influenced by Cezanne...One third of the paintings in his first one-man show in 1939 apparently showed this.

One of first Bulgarian painters to paint industrial



landscapes, his paintings generally have a sombre tone. One art critic drew attention to "a certain veiled strangeness, the impression that not all has been said". He apparently lost during the war most of his work from the late 1930s and early 40s...

1940-45 he was a stage designer in Plovdiv

1947 he took up landscape painting again when he spent several months in Romania - with work around both Baie Mare and the Ploiesti oilfields

1958 he visited Russia and Georgia whose "exotic texture made him experience again, in a gentler fashion, the ecstasy of rich polychromatic painting" (Svintila) After that he had another creative outburst - returning to the painting of the Rhodopes and Melnik of his youth - in Melnik finding a "new style of composing strange, light grey and silver tonalities"

An uncompromising artist, he suffered poverty - but did enjoy some honours in 1963 and 1976.

Exhibited widely in Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Budapest, Bucharest, Vienna and Moscow.

70x60 sold for 2,000 euros in 2011

Behar, Marko



1914-1973

graphic, satire

Born in village in Yambol, schooled Burgas where his family moved in 1927, No early art education, he worked initially in the retail trade in Sofia in 1935 and had a first exhibition in 1940 by which time he was active in the communist movement.

He spent 1941/42 and 1943/44 in a Jewish Labour camp. 46-49 he worked for the (Starshel) Hornet magazine

It was the 1950s before he was able to start an art education (in Leningrad) and returned to Bulgaria in 1957 to become Deputy-Editor of Starshel

1958-63 he was an instructor in the problems of art at the Central Committee of the Communist Party

Belkovsky, Asen	1879-1957	landscape portraits	born Assenovgrad, he studied at the state drawing school from 1896-99 after which he spent 4 years at Kazan art academy (Russia) - followed by a year at St Petersburg art academy. Then some teaching at Munich and a visit to Paris. Delicate colouring He returned to Bulgaria in 1907 - and engaged in restoration work and art criticism http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=157
Bellstoinev Georgi	1909-1968	aquarellist	Born Samokov
Belogushev, Methody	1905		http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=329

Beshkov, Ilia

1901- 1958

Graphics; cartoons

born in a small town near Pleven. In 1918-1920, he studied at the Faculty of Law of Sofia University and briefly returned home as a teacher. In 1921, he enrolled in painting at the Sofia School of Art and graduated in 1926.

As a student, Beshkov published caricatures in the Maskarad, Div Dyado, Balgaran, Starshel and Vik magazines and illustrated the issues of the T. F. Chipev and Hemus printing houses. From 1925 on, he co-operated with the Pladne magazine among others. He was twice arrested due to his leftist political views: once after participating in the June uprising following the [Bulgarian coup d'état of 1932](#) and then during 1925 in the wake of the [St Nedelya Church assault](#)



In 1930, Beshkov became a member of the Narodno Izkustvo movement. He was from the founders of the famous newspaper Sturshel (Hornet) in 1940, and published in it without signature or pseudonym.

One of his best known comic characters was 'Spekulanta Maks'. In 1945, he became a lecturer of drawing, illustration and print design at the National Academy of Fine Art; he was elected a tenured professor in 1953 and led the Department of Graphics until his death in 1958 in Sofia.

Beshkov's political caricatures were noted for their sarcasm and deep connotations. His works were humanist, democratic, revolutionary and national in nature. The Pleven art gallery is named in his honour and most of his works are exhibited there.

sketches not difficult to find for 200 euros

[Nice video here](#) - in Bulgarian and [superb E-book](#)

Ilyia Beshkov interviews and pics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-ZRDlStAGo>

Boiadjiev, Hristo	1912-2001	Portrait, historical, landscape, still-life	Studied at the Sofia Academy with future big names in Bulgarian art eg Zlatyu Boyadziev Vladimir Kavaldjiev Vasil Barakov and others. Studied under George Karakashev and others. " Girl in golden ochre " received an award at graduation of the artist. Remained until the end of his life in Pleven, became one of those honorable labourers of art in which creative and enlightened spirit is fully alive, and without which the picture of Bulgarian art from the first half of the twentieth century would not be complete
Boiadjiev Nikolay	1904-1963	Figurative, landscape	Born in Svishtov where he quickly developed an aptitude for drawing. Graduated from the State High School in Commerce there and was sent by the family to continue his economic studies in Sofia. He decided, however, at short notice to try for enrolment at Sofia Art School and emerged in 1925 in the top few of those qualifying - despite his lack of preparation. He studies in Boris Mitov's studio and graduated in 1930.

			From 1932, he was an art teacher in Shumen High School and attracted increasing fame. In 1942 an article compared his colouring with that of Rubens and spoke of his "great style, acute sense of tone, clarity of technique and pronounced individuality" In 1951 he became a teacher at the Sofia Art School. Expelled in 1958 from Union of Bulgarian artists for his refusal to work on prescribed themes, he increasingly focussed on drawing. Superb charcoal and pencil portrait work - an underrated artist, his work s are impossible to find.
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Boaidjiev, Petar



1907-1963

sea and landscape

a superb and underrated artist - one of my real favourites for collecting. I have four - including this one and the one which graces chapter one

<http://auction-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=109>

Boiadjiev, Tsenko	1902-1972	portraits, landscapes	born Totleben village, Pleven 1928-32 zagreb http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=503
Borov, Yordan	1904-1962	Reviving old crafts landscape	Born Dryanovo, Kazanluk 1932 graduated (Zahariev, Badzhov)

Boiadjiev, Zlatyu

1903-1976

Born Brezovo, Plovdiv Region.

Known sometimes as the Bulgarian Breughel.

His work is divided into two very different periods due to a stroke and partial paralysis of the right side in (1951). The first period is characterized by stylistic influences typical of Dutch paintings from the XVI-XVII century The second period is characterized by fabulous, often symbolic images and compositions of rural life.



He graduated Painting at the Art Academy - Sofia (1932), under Professor Zeno Todorov.

In the first period Zlatyu Boyadziev created the most valuable paintings - the height of European standards eg "Brezovski shepherds" (1941), "In the Field" (1943), "Svinarka" (1945) "Mini Pernik" (1945), "Brigade" (1947) and others. portraits

Following a stroke in 1951 Zlatyu Boyadziev became paralyzed and no longer painted. He then began frescoing with



his left hand disparate works. A hundred compositions, portraits and landscapes with pronounced expression and drama - others are filled with strange characters: "Brezovo Village" (1959), "to the slaughterhouse."

Slowly but confidently Boyadziev began to paint with his left hand - a feat that is not within the reach of everyone. Some his masterpieces like "Rhodope wedding", "April Uprising", "Return of the hunt" and "Apocalypse" - in various versions - were created then.

He died on February 2, 1976 in Plovdiv. After November 10 Zlatyu Boyadziev becomes an obsession for collectors and is the most counterfeited Bulgarian artist. According to some newspapers, Plovdiv has a whole factory of his works. Usually imitates the second period Boiadzhiev because artistry is in

the first reach of counterfeiters.

<http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1903-1976.html>

65x50 fetched 15,000 euros in March 2011

Bozhilov-Slona Georgi	1935-2001	modernist	Strictly not a realist
Bozhinov, Alexander 1878-1968 cartoonist born Svistov, educated Russe, he laid the basis for Bulgaria's strong tradition of caricaturists. He studied drawing at the newly opened state school from 1896-1899 and went in 1901 to Munich where he stayed frequently during the next 20 years, being influenced by the Simplicismus magazine there. He edited from 1904-09 Sofia's satirical magazine „Balgaren”. Paintings not easy to find - although this one sold for 750 euros a few years ago			
			
Bradistilova, Olga	1908-1981	master of classic genres - portrait, landscape, still life.	She was born on October 3, 1908 in Stara Zagora. Graduated in painting from the Academy of Arts in Sofia (1929), then specialized in Rome (1934-1936). In 1936 Olga returned to Bulgaria, makes exhibitions, After September 9 1944 works as a free artist often does portraits on demand. two exhibitions in Italy (Milan and Rome). Exposure in Rome received a gold medal in 1969. In 1972 she was awarded Academician of the International Academy Tiborina in Rome - the same title carried by Salvador Dali and Joan Miro. Bratistilova Olga was also awarded the Golden Legion contribution to the art of Italy

Bunardjiev, Petar	1921-1995	Landscape	nice colourist Principal of Sofia Art School in 1970s 500 euros http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=512
Burova, Todorka	1902-1985	Portrait, still- life	Born Ruse Deaf from an early age Admitted to Dresden Fine Arts Academy in 1925 and graduated under Otto Dix in 1931 On return to BG, exhibited with the Association of Women Artists and wrote art criticism Expelled in 1944 from the Union of BG artists - found solace with friends such as Nenov, Savoba-Nenova and Sotirov
Cantemirov, Petar	1905-1967		http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=281
Chokanov, Denjo	1901-1982	landscape	Born Veliko Tarnovo. Graduated 1926 from Sofia Art School - from class of Prof Gyuendiev. A great colourist and favourite of mine http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=54 700 euros 40x50
Cholakov Zhivko	1914-1978	portraits landscapes	born in the village of Beloslav, Varna, in 1914, and died 1978 in Sofia. In 1939 he graduated in painting Prof.Nikola Ganushev at the National Art Academy in Sofia. In the period 1946-1978 Zhivko Tcholakov taught drawing at the Architectural Institute. Founder of the Department Drawing and Modeling together with Boris Kolev, and later became the dean of the department. Specializes in Czechoslovakia, Italy and France.

Chorbadzhiiski Dimitar (Chudomir)

1890-1967

Caricatures

Born Turia, Kazanlak

1906 State Drawing School

1920 Kazanlak teacher

1930 Director of Kaz Gallery

"Chudomir" is the alias of one of the most popular Bulgarian writers and artists - Dimitar Chorbadzhiyski. His many friends and acquaintances called him simply "Miracle" not only to express closeness, but to highlight his extraordinary originality.

Choudomir was a truly unique phenomenon in the history of Bulgarian



culture - combining extremely rare gifts as both a writer and artist. His brilliant (2500) sketches, drawings, caricatures, portraits, compositions magnificent humorous stories and feuilletons (he issued five collections and reprinted more than 60 times) keep Bulgarians laughing still. He was also a prominent museum and cultural figure, researcher, lecturer in painting, journalist, editor ...

He had close personal and creative contacts with celebrities such as Nikolai Raynov, Elin Pelin, Geo Milev, Shtarkelov Constantine and a worldwide reputation (his short stories have been translated into twenty languages), but despite all this, never left home for long in his home town and the Valley of Roses, remaining throughout his life close to the people of this region, which are the source of his inspiration.

Inexhaustible humanism moves his pen and brush, when seeking support on the Bulgarian and the universal character of his characters - earth, vital and wise

as nature itself. Chudomirova's creative world has long since become a way to penetrate the Bulgarian mentality. His representative art exhibition "Fellow Countrymen" in recent years visited several European capitals and was hailed as magnificent spiritual ambassador of Bulgaria. Almost all the creative heritage of Choudomir stored in Literature and Art Museum "Chudomir".

<http://www.chudomir.eu/> http://www.sitebulgarizaedno.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=498:2013-01-09-17-03-56&catid=29:2010-04-24-09-14-13&Itemid=61



Chorbadzhtii ski, Mara	1895-1974	Portrait, landscape and still-life	Born of Renaissance family in Maritsa Grad 1921 from Sofia Art school (under Mcvv and Stefan Ivanov) settled in Kazanluk with her husband 29/30 they both were in France From 1936 teacher in Kazanlak
Chuklev, Petar		Graphics	

Christov Ivan

1900-1987

Landscapes

Born Vidin

In 1925, graduated in painting at the National Art Academy, Sofia under Profs. Nikola Ganushev and Nikola Marinov. Specialised at the Art Academy in Munich. After his return, he began working as a teacher in Tryavna.

From 1943 he was a freelance artist. He spent every summer in Veliko Turnovo to paint picturesque landscapes, inspired by the architecture of the old city.



His works of this period are characterized by deep colour, handled with verve impulsive. Preferred is a blue-green range

The painter created panoramic landscapes from Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Melnik and Sozopol.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=161>

600 euros

Dabova, Zlatka	1927-1997	mainly woodcut and lithography	Born Malo Konare, Pazardzhik. In 1953 graduated graphics at the Art Academy in the class of prof. Ilyia Beshkov. In her works the themes of folklore, Renaissance architecture, lifestyle, childhood and motherhood are the most common. From 1953 she participated in exhibitions around the world-Sao Paulo, Lugano, Rome, Moscow, Warsaw, Tokyo and many other cities around the world. Illustrated many books, a graphic folk tales, stories for children. Wife of the artist Hristo Neykov. For example see section 3.2

Dankov, Boris

1906-1997

portraits, landscapes, still life

born Kazachevo village, Lovech

1920 - his family moved in Lovech. In 1931 he entered the Art Academy in Sofia. Graduated "Painting" with Prof. Nikola Marinov,

1933 - 1946 he was an art teacher in Lovech, 1946 - 1949 - a teacher of drawing in Sofia ; 1949 -1950 - Chief Inspector of drawing in the Ministry of Education, 1951 - 1970 - professor, associate professor, professor of "painting" at the Art Academy in Sofia,

1960 - 1964 and 1966 -1970 on - Vice Rector of the Academy of Arts



good landscapes for reasonable prices

Dachev, Petar

1896-1968

Landscape

Socialist realist

Born Kotel

During 1912-1913 he completed one term at the Industrial School of Arts in Sofia - the class of Prof. Tzeno Todorov. For the period 1924 - 1926 he attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Tzarigrad. He established there friendship relations with Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master.

In 1943 he published his book "The Unknown Tzarigrad". Book is illustrated by him.

In 1948 he arranged his third individual exhibition in Sofia.

In 1967 he spent two months in Paris.

I am indebted to the Victoria Gallery for this text -

The name of this artist and critic is well known solely to a relatively limited circle of specialists and admirers.

Impression from the first seeing with his creative works, even one single work - remains forever. He can't be taken for any other author. The typical colouring, the light streaming from the round - slightly deformed forms, the perfect composition, are the unique style of this great talent.

His rich archive is preserved in the historical museum in Dobrich. There are kept also the works from his exhibition in Trapkova gallery. In the middle of the 20s the exposition of the young, self-educated and unknown artist provoked much comments - first and foremost for the expressionism of his works.

His pictures are distinguished for their energy, contrasting colours of red and blue, the particularly tender rounded forms and full colours and streaming light. The places all we know, the common landscapes, are expressed in some fantastic shapes and are somehow unrealistically beautiful.

Alexandar Bozhinov, "Svobodna Rech" newspaper, 52/1924

"...Dachev ...came from Varna, he is young and full of energy, living in the odd world of his unmanageable imagination and paints. His ideas do not warm, his lines do not calm, his technique - nervous and fluctuating - is neither original, not revealing the master, but everything reveals his artistic nature, living, striving to find a way he has to pass to the end. Out of all young men and their attempts Petar Dachev is surely the most interesting for his creative work: his themes are aging, nature he depicts is fantasy, his mood is mystical..."

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=260>

Best known for his large industrial plants

1,600 euros 40x50

Dechev, Danail	1891-1962	landscape,	Born Razgrad. Self-taught painter. Graduated from the industrial textile school of Sliven. 1932 visited France and Italy.
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			From 1919 to 1939 lives in Plovdiv, and after 1939, in Sofia, but rarely stays in one place. Opens his first individual exhibition in Sofia in 1933. Heavy impressionist style work sold in april 2012 auction for 1,250 euros http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=165
Denev, Boris 1889 (??)-1969 Landscape Born Veliko Tarnovo; In 1903-1908 he was teacher in drawing in Tarnovo. His first solo exhibition as amateur artist held in Sofia in 1909. From 1909 to 1913 he studied in Munich. As official war artist from 1914 to 1935 he created battle oil paintings, many sketches and drawings depicting soldiers' everyday life. His preferences were in the fields of landscape and portrait. He was inspired by the beauty of Melnik, Samokov, Plovdiv and Sofia region. Stripped of his membership of the Union of Bulgarian Artists for a decade until being readmitted in 1956. During this period, he was forbidden from painting in the open air- and had to resort to painting the back yard of his house! http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=48 http://www.galleryloran.com/bg/authors/view/boris-denev 1,500 euros			
Deneva, Slavka	1929-1984	Figurative, still life etc	daughter of Boris Denev, a highly original artist who "never favoured splendid nature but consciously sought the banal" (Angelov p 29). Her primitivist paintings vibrate with colour and life. They rarely come on the market.
Dilov, Dilo	1914-1984	landscape	Born village in Vratsa Pupil at Belgrade Art School of Belgrade artist Milunovic (taught by Cezanne) - highly original but switched to Sofia art school after the Belgrade bombings and graduated there - to teach in at the Teacher' Training Collge in Pleven. Despite his communist activity, his commitment to landscapes put him out of favour for the next decade Only got to paint in his own style after Khrushchev's 1956 speech....First solo exhibition in Pleven in 1958
Dimchevski, Tsvyatko	1909-1991	Battle scenes, landscapes	Born Butan, Vratsa Studied Sofia art school 1931-36 under Marinov
Diolev, Dimitar	1898-1948	landscape	Born Russe

Dionisie, Diono			http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=120
Djambazov, Ivan	??	Landscape	Spent time in Razgrad interesting - and reasonably priced http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=508
Dimitrov, Ivan	1850-1944	Portrait Genre painting	Studied under his father Dmitr Kanchev of the Tryavna school - then at Bucharest art academy Graduated 1883 from Art Academy Paris after which he settled first in Gabrovo - famous for "The bagpipe player"
Dimitrov Nikola	1894-1989	landscape	Born 1894 in the village Pudarso, Plovdiv. Graduated Arts Sofia in 1921. Member of the Association of South Bulgarian artists <u>Underrated artist</u> whose work goes for very reasonable prices http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=76
Dimitrov, Todor	1900-1964	Landscape figural composition, still lifes	He studied at the Art Academy in Sofia. Driven by a love of nature and passion for travel tours in Europe, Africa, America In 1921 presents an exhibition in Bucharest and the same year he moved to Italy Province nerves. After a short stay in Italy went to Spain, and from there - in South America, in the province of Chaco. He visited Africa, Singapore, Tanganyika, London (1931). In 1932 returned to Bulgaria. During his travels organises three exhibitions abroad and three in Sofia after his return (1932, 1935, 1938). He prefers working with oil paints. With poetic skill recreates the beauty of the native nature in views of Tryavna Sofia Rhodopes. His works are distinguished by a deep insight into the Bulgarian nature with poetic feeling and scenic mastery. His magnificent harvest, threshing, glances at the sub-Balkan towns and villages take us into a past world saturated with color and light. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=177 450 euros 49x68 Dec 2015
Diolev, Dimitar	1898-1948	Landscape, figurative	Born Russe http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=269

Dimitrov, Vladimir (The Master)

1882-1960;

born Frolosh (Kyustendil)

He is considered one of the most talented 20th century Bulgarian painters and probably the most remarkable stylist in Bulgarian painting

His portraits and compositions have expressive colour, idealistic quality of the image and high symbolic strength. Many consider his artwork a fauvist type

Started his life as a clerk. In 1903 he enrolled in the School of Drawing in Sofia where he had been called the Master (Maistora) for the first time. Visited St Petersburg, Moscow and, in 1910, Italy.

Then to Svishtov where, from 1911-18 he taught gymnastics and calligraphy. During this period he was a war artist. 1918 returned to teach at Kyustendil
1922-23 worked in Italy.

In 1922 he met the American John Crane in Rome and sold him much of his work for the next few years.

More than 700 oil paintings of him are in the [Vladimir Dimitrov Art Gallery](#) of Kyustendil. See this [short study](#)



Dobrev, Dobri

1898-1973

Landscape and village life



born Sliven

1921- 1925 student at Prague Fine Arts Academy.

1921 toured the galleries of Dresden, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna and Budapest

After graduating, he lived and worked in Republic of Czech for another 13 years (until 1938) exhibiting and travelling extensively.

In 1938 he returned to Bulgaria and lived until 1954 in Sliven (16 years) and afterwards in Sofia.

From 1954-1965 he taught at Sofia Art School.

He painted landscapes, daily scenes, figurative compositions - with a very distinctive set of soft hues -

ochre, red and touches of blue....His preferred topic are the markets in his native town of Sliven.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=46>

His paintings don't often appear on the market. They will cost a minimum of 700 euros

Dobrinov, Alexander

1898-1958

Great cartoonist

Born Veliko Tarnovo.

In the period 1915 - 1919 he studied at the Arts school (Sofia). Specializing in Vienna, the famous "School of Applied Arts" (1921-1924).

From 1921 worked in the field of caricature and portrait images create psychological depth. Prints cartoons in newspapers, magazines, collections "Temida", "Hornet" in programs for theatrical performances and some humorous magazines abroad.

Works in Vienna (1921-1921), Prague (1927 - 1932), Rome (1932 - 1933), Warsaw (1937), creating cartoon portraits of prominent public and cultural figures. In the 50s cooperated with the newspaper "Literary Front," "National Culture", "Worker's Act", "Evening News" and others.

In September 1944 he was amongst the first group arrested in the communist putsch and held in a Sofia prison - sentenced in 1945 to 2 years imprisonment which he served in the Red Cross Hospital - then he painted can labels in a factory (his membership of the Union of Bulgarian Artists was restored!). But he lost it again when he was, for some reason, interned for 4 years at the notorious Loukovit camp - one of more than a hundred such places..

In 1950 he suffered 2 heart attacks - but was refused entry to Sofia (and the Union of artists) and was allowed to settle only in the village of Panasharev (in a priest's house_

Not easy to find his work on the market.

http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=211

Dobrujdanski, Todor	1904-1990	Landscape	Born Bashkoyi village in North Dobrogea. In 1931 - 1934. Dobrudjanski lives in Paris, where he attended the renowned art studios His first solo exhibition was in Varna in 1938 and soon gained a reputation as a talented artist. In 1940 he settled in Silistra. After 1952 he moved to Varna. His first solo exhibition in Sofia was held in 1942. Then Princess Evdokia buys his works that are kept in the palace art gallery and whose fate later is unknown. In 1950 he holds his second solo exhibition in Sofia, and immediately thereafter exhibitions in Veliko Tarnovo and Gabrovo and became a member of the Union of Bulgarian Artists. For UBA he applied with a sea and a winter landscape. Yet another lovely but neglected artist! http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=61 http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=381 900 euros (for 52x72)
Doganov, Liuben	1884-1975	Landscape	Student of Atanas Mihov http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=287

Dogramadzhiev Marko	1968		Born Sliven Secondary education in high school in his hometown. In 1915 he graduated from National School of Drawing in Sofia in the class of prof. Ivan Markvichka, In the workshop of Markvichka, Dogramadzhiev acquire a solid artistic training in the spirit of realistic art. From his teacher youngest artist inherited affinity kind and native motifs. In 1924-25 Marco Dogramadzhiev won a competition for a one-year specialization in painting in Paris. Stay in the French capital gives him the opportunity to touch the greatest masterpieces of classical art and at the same time to get acquainted with modern trends in art After completing his education Dogramadzhiev taught in the hometown of Sliven for thirty-four years. In some of his works shows an affinity for Impressionism as current. The artist works in portrait, figure composition and landscape. Some of his works show strong social commitment. http://artparis-moskva.com/?p=4171
Donev, Bocho	1904-1969	landscape Figurative	Born Oreshak Lovech district. 1929 - 1944 was a high school teacher in town. He painted landscapes and genre painting with a social purpose. . He worked in the field of applied arts. Studied painting in Sofia under Prof. Dimitar Gyudzhenov. 1935 - 1936 at Warsaw School of Fine arts ability. Also studyied graphic. Drew inspiration from museums in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=179 500 euros (for 45x64)
Draganov, Dimitar	1908-1996	graphics	born Izvorovo village, Targovishte Prof Todorov taught him at the Sofia School of art from which he graduated in 1932 after which he returned to teach at his village school. Concentrated in his graphic work on miners There is apparently a gallery in his village with his works
Eftimov, Vasil	1900-1987	Portraits genre	born in Kyustendil. Graduated from Art Academy in 1925, majoring in painting. Initially, under the influence of his close friend Vladimir Dimitrov Vassil Evtimov turned to portraits and genre painting. Upon completion of the academy, he was a teacher in Pazardzhik. Later, he worked three years in the State Printing House - Sofia, as an artist, where he created 23 projects for stamps with historical themes. Vassil Evtimov twice visited

			Paris, where he had a solo exhibition. After World War II, worked at the National Art Gallery and the Ethnographic Museum. In 1955-1956, the artist visited China for six months and made exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities. He was among the founders of the Bulgarian-Chinese Friendship Society. He created his own theory of spectral colours in different ranges like musical tones - major and minor. His monotypes are rich in shapes, colors and invoices. Participated in numerous exhibitions in Kyustendil - 1979 Munich - 1985. The largest collection of his works in the Art Gallery "Vladimir Dimitrov - the Master" - Kyustendil. Vassil Evtimov painted a series of portraits of famous personages Sofia families, still lives, landscapes and figurative compositions.
Egarov, Stefan	1882-1973	Classicist, landscape	Born Sliven where he spent most of his life 1901-1908 Sofia art school (under Angelov and Vesin) with travel to Italy 1908-1910 Munich art school War artist 1918-33 teacher in Sliven
Enchev-Vidyu, Ivan	1882-1936	theatre	Born Kazanlak 1901-05 National Drawing School where he showed interest also in theatre, archeology and art history 1906 Munich Back to Bulgaria 1908 where he pursued his interest in folk art and art criticism, publishing and illustrating several books on this subject
Evstaviev Georgi	1875-1923	Military artist	Born Stara Zagora 1891-94 studied at Florence Academy of Arts 1898 graduated from Rome Academy 1900 in Munich and Paris From 1903 teacher in Sofia
Filchev, Ivan	1926-2010	Landscape, portrait	Born Lovech While studying secondary education, he worked as a potter in Troyan. Sofia Art Academy in 1957 under Nenko Balkan. Since 1961 is a member of the UBA. In 60 years teaching at the Academy as an assistant and then transferred to a freelancer. Several years working in Razgrad and closely cooperate with the group of artists Razgrad.

			Ivan Filchev is the creative generation of the 60s. Painter with individual artistic style that works in the field of oil painting, watercolor, mosaic and fresco. His works are in different countries, in private collections in the Art Gallery of Razgrad 900 euros for a sensitively-coloured landscape (like Worpswede school) 57x77 at Enakor auction Dec 2015
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Frantzaliiski, Pavel

1884-1956

Aquarelle

Born Samokov, he graduated in 1907 in the class painting of Ivan Mrkvicka.

After two years of teaching in Sofia and Stara Zagora came back to his hometown and taught drawing at the school from 1909 to 1931 - taking an active part in the public life of the city.

His name is associated with the establishment of the art collection at the Museum of History in Samokov. He was also an active hiker and mountaineer.

He painted mostly with watercolour mountain landscapes, with Rila as the main theme.

The topics of rural life moved him. Had over 30 solo exhibitions in Sofia, Dupnitsa, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Zagreb, Ljubljana.

[Loran Gallery had a nice exhibition](http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=112) recently celebrating 130 years since his birth

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=112>



Ganchev, Rusi

1895-1965

Landscape

A favourite of mine.....Ganchev was born in Ruse. Graduated from the Academy of Art in 1924. He then returned to his hometown and was a founding member of the House of Arts and the Art Gallery.



He worked as a teacher at that time in Rousse and villages. In the late 40s he moved to Sofia and worked until 1960 as an artist at the Ethnographic Museum.

Ruse gallery has only three of his paintings, and national - none - but not difficult to pick up his work.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=252>

In paintings dominate river scenes with landscapes of the Danube coast,

landscapes and still lifes.

300 euros

Gaidarov, Lyben	1906	Socialist realist	Borne Russe 1926 started Art School, Sofia 1931 graduated under N Marinov
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			1934-43 art teacher at Petrich 1943-1961 art teacher Pernik http://gallery.pernik.org/lyben-gaidarov.html
Gancheva, Nevena	1897-1984		Born Ruse. http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=245
Ganushev, Nikola	1889-1958	Portrait, nudes	Born in Razgrad. He ends with several awards and honors Academy of Fine Arts "Albertina" in Turin in 1913 with Prof. Giacomo Grossi and Ludzhi White. From 1913 to 1920, he was an art teacher in Sofia. He participated in the First World War as a war artist. From 1921 to 1923 and from 1932 to 1949 professor of painting at the Art Academy in Sofia, where he taught many famous Bulgarian artists. From 1923 to 1928 lives and works in France. Participates in exhibitions of the Society of French artists. Academic painter with salon taste, he is loved by the richest part of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie 9 September 1944. painted by him dearly public and ladies dressed in evening dresses, surrounded by luxurious interiors
Gasharov, Ruhmen	1936-	naïve, pop art	"His major topic is man and his daily routine. Pieces of embroidery and lace, fluttering angels and showy shooting galleries, leaflets and newspaper pieces all combine to give rise to the Bulgarian type of pop-art. The markedly naïve manner the artist employs has developed into a subtle artistic style. The lyricism his personages invoke, contrary to the expectations, stem from the banal, the kitsch and all that is very close to the manner of the daily routine. The freshness in Gasharov's canvases comes from the artist's subtle understanding of man, his feeling for the human soul and his ability to recreate in a concise manner the specific moments of the mass culture that have revealed most vividly throughout the years man and man's daily life. http://www.gashar.dir.bg/
Gaydarov, Valko	1937-2009	landscapes	Born Devin Grad 1964 from Sofia art school under Nenko Balkanski Same year founded the Smolyan gallery and held position of curator until 2003
Gazdov, Ivan	1945-	graphics	Born Yambol – one of Bulgaria's great graphic artists graphicature

Genev, Slavi

1893-1977

Born Maritsa (Haskovo)

Landscape

studied at Sofia School of Art until 1923 - with a spell 1917/18 at Munich Art Academy.

And 1926/27 at a paris art school.

1928 Italy

Worked as an art teacher.



Made Samokov his base in 1930 ; taught art there from 1931-1948; and became the Director of the Historical museum from 1949-1958

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=243>

works costs about 400 euros - and another favourite of mine

Georgiev, Boris	1888-1962	graphic artist	born Varna after which his parents moved to Odessa where he had his schooling. Studied art in St Petersburg 1905-09. He continued his art studies in Munich from 1910. 1911-1913 he travelled by foot throughout Europe - from Norway to Spain - studying drawing in Florence for a few months. Two years he lived in an alpine house he built himself near Trentino. Italy was his base - although he also travelled to India making friends with Mahatmi Gandhi and Nehru. He does not seem to have returned to BG before his death in Rome.
Georgiev, Gospodin	1909-1978	Landscape, portrait	born Stara Zagora. Graduated Sofia 1931 and 1932 studied at Academy of Art Rome. Teacher in Stara Zagora. Awarded Cyril and Methodius medal 1971 http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=217

Georgiev, Pencho

1900-1940

secessionist - theatre design with strong interest in graphics, woodcuts etc
born Vratsa. Set designer Sofia.

1926-29 worked in Russe's municipal theatre.

1929-34 Paris where he specializes in applied arts in the workshop of Paul
Laurent. Social issues dominate in his work

He tends to turn ordinary rural people in monumental characters.

Used chalky colors. Exhibited 11 international exhibitions



Georgov, Stefan	1899-1987	Socialist realist, landscape	Born Varna Grad Sofia Art School 1928 1932-48 taught in Pernik and Sof+ia - focusing very much on aspects of mining. http://art.blog.libvar.bg/stefan-georgov/
Gerasimov, Georgi	1905-1977	Portraits, graphics	Born Pazardzhik 1926-31 studied at Sofia Art School under N Marinov and V Zahariev 1937/38 graduated in graphics (with Honours) at Prague Fine Arts Academy He spent most of his working life in Pazardzhik - leaving his collection of about 7,000 drawings and paintings to the art gallery
Geshev, Jordan	1907-1973	Aquarelle landscapes	born in Chichil in the Vidin region. In 1930. graduated from the Sofia Art School - receiving a special decoration by prof.Haralampi Tachev. Member of the "Modern Art" association. Organized 22 solo exhibitions. Participated in joint and collective exhibitions. A significant part of his works occupies landscapes of Rila, Pirin, Stara Planina. Exceptional aquarelle master http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=103
Getsov, Ivan	1910-1991	portraits, landscapes, figure compositions. Independence wars	Born in Liaskovets. In 1938 graduated from the Painting in the Art Academy under Prof. Dechko Uzunov. Participate in the DAE. He visited many countries in Europe. Member of Central Committee of the Dimitrov Young Communist League http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=199
Gloginkov, Simeon	1919-97	Landscapes, portraits	Born Burgas. Graduated Sofia art school 1943 under Boris Mitov
Goev,	1925-2013	various genres of painting	born in Burgas, in a family of immigrants from the village Mokreni . From 1939 to 1944 he studied at the Real

Vladimir			School in Burgas, where his class teacher is the big Burgas artist and sculptor Petko Zadgorski . Member of the Union of Bulgarian artists and for more than 20 years a member of the Management Board.
Goeva, Elsa	1928-	(recently) Sombre abstracts of buildings	
Grigorov, Boycho	1916-1997	Figurative compositions landscapes	1943 graduated Art School under Nikola Marinov 1948 art teacher in military academy 1951 assistant at Art School 1971 full Professor Socialist realist (in dark style of Christov) http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=297
Gyudzhenov, Dimitar	1899-1979	Historical themes	In 1915 he graduated in painting in the class of Prof. Zeno Todorov Industrial School of Arts (now the National Art Academy) in Sofia, meanwhile studied two semesters at the Paris National School of Fine Arts (1913-14) . He started painting as a war artist in the headquarters of the Eighth Infantry Division Tundzha - see his paintings preserved in the Museum of Military History . His aim is to portray them the essence of military events inseparable from the lives of ordinary soldiers. Between 1920 and 1933 Dimitar Gyudzhenov taught at the Academy where he was professor . Among his students there are Stoyan Venev and Titirinov . In 1925 painted his first paintings of historical subjects , which occupies the main genre in all its work. Other genres in which Gyudzhenov works are domestic painting, landscape and portrait . From 1933 to 1945 , he worked as a painter at the headquarters of the Bulgarian army , which inspired a whole series of paintings of military and historical themes and personalities. After 1944, the social issues are also well represented in his paintings . In 1959 Dimitar Gyudzhenov and Professor Nicholas Kozhuharov were entrusted with the restoration of Stara Zagora church "St. Dimitar " . In 1961 they painted the Varna Orthodox Church " St. Nicholas " . Gyudzhenov also painted murals of churches in Burgas , Plovdiv. Participated in exhibitions of these companies in Bulgaria and abroad (Berlin, Vienna , New York, Prague) .
Gyurova, Bronka	1910-1995	landscape	born Shumen; in Belgium 1937/38 for a special course in illustration. First solo exhibition 1943. Married artist Eliezer Alesheh in 1947. Emigrated with him to South America in 1952

Hadjimladeno v Naum	1894-1985	Humorous Figurative	Born Samokov In 1921 he graduated from the National Art Academy, Sofia under Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka. The same year, organized his first solo exhibition in Samokov. He began to work as a teacher in his hometown. From 1934 to 1946 works and lives in Sofia - accepted as a member of the Unit of Bulgarian Artists, works at various newspapers, illustrates literary series "Ancient Bulgaria". During this period Hadjimladenov participates in a number of General Art Exhibitions in the capital and other cities, in the presentations of Bulgarian art abroad - 'Roerich Museum' (New York, 1935), Athens (1938). Participates in the International Biennial of Humour and Satire in Gabovo city. In 1937 Hadjimladenov was awarded a gold medal at the Paris presentation for his work 'Market in Samokov. " 1,500 euros for 30x30 ArtpriceBG has a good data base of his work Also http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=172
Hodina Aneta	1878-1941	satire portrait	One of first 3 women graduates from the art school in 1901 Journalist in Munich and Paris from where she sent satirical sketches back to Sofia
Hrisopulus, Ianis	1901 -1985	landscape	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=202
Iliev, Haralampi	1873-1955		Born Vidin Educated Prague Academy of Art Teacher Kyusetendil and Sofia
Ivanov, Boris	1904-1993	Portraits, landscape	born Sofia and graduated from Sofia Art School in 1927, Exhibited internationally; taught applied graphics and painting at Sofia Art School 1946-51. In the 1960s he wrote numerous articles about artistic life in Bulgaria.
Ivanov, Ivan	1879-1966	landscape, portrait	Pp24-26 of 130 selected works from the BNB collection http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=214
Ivanov, Ivan B	1933-?	Graphic,	Born near Tirgovishte From a small 1981 book I have of his woodcuts and graphics, seems active mainly in 1970s. Influenced by Masserel, Pascin and expressionists. One of many artists who seem to have airbrushed out of existence....

Ivanov, Lyubo	1891-1974	landscape	
Ivanov, Sabi	1896-1976	Landscape	1918-21 studies at Art Academy, Sofia http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=293 My "end of the village" and "boat at Sozopol"
Ivanov, Sava			http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=511
Ivanov, Sergei	1881-1967	Portraits, landscapes	studied at Sofia's Drawing School 1898-1905; then 2 years at Munich's Art Academy. Most of his works were destroyed during the 2nd WW Sofia bombings 700 euros for 50x33
Ivanov, Stefan	1875-1951	portraits landscapes	graduated Sofia Art School 1903 - following Miroslav Markvitchka's class. Teacher at the School from 1907 - full Professor from 1914
Ivanov, Vasil	1909-1975	Graphics Landscape cosmos	Born Sofia Childhood in Kazanlak - influenced by Chudomir 32-39 Sofia art school (Marinov) See Loran gallery site

Karamihailova Elena



1875-1965
Portrait

born in Shoumen, she graduated from Robert College Constantinople in 1895. Then a graduate of the Art Academy in Munich, Germany

She was the first Bulgarian lady-artist.

The portraits of women she painted are strong psychological studies.

Kabakchiev, Hristo	1879-1970	aquarelle and architectural landscape. Depictions of ancient Tarnovo.	He originated from a family of strong Bulgarian national revival and revolutionary traditions. In 1899 he was one of the first graduates of the School of Arts. He was then a teacher in Veliko Tarnovo, Koprivshitz. Painter of the museum of ethnography in Sofia. A great part of his works were destroyed during the bombings in 1944.
Kancheva, Dora	1926-2012	marine, urban and natural landscapes	born Stara Zagora. 1951 graduated painting at the National Art Academy under prof. Dechko Uzunov. Dora's father was a student of prof. Ivan Markvichka. Besides the family environment, friendship with artists Slavka Deneva

			and Lika Yanko influenced her artistic development. At the heart of the picturesque style of Dora Kancheva is painting plein air. She toured the Sofia neighbourhoods and villages in search of subjects meeting their non-traditional conceptions of scenery. Her paintings are characterized by expressionistic almost naif patterns, large brushstrokes and contrasts - with colours of festivity and light. Dora Kancheva works are owned by almost all state galleries in Bulgaria and private collectors worldwide.
Kanov, Nikola	1864-1939	Portraits, landscape	Born Lom After some teaching, he studied architecture 1885-88 at the St Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. 1889-1892 saw him continue his studies at the Munich Technical HIghSchool On his return to BG, he taught art at Gabrovo and Russe - from 1898-1925 taught in his home town.
Kantemirov, Petar	1885-1967	town landscapes	Born Sopor. 1907-09 Munich Art Academy with visits to St Petersburg. In 1912 he was one of the team painting the new Alexander Nevski Cathedral. 1932-1950 Russian and drawing teacher at Karlovo
Karakashev, Georgi	1899-1970	Theatre; landscape	Born Russe. studied art at the Bucharest Academy of Art between 1919 and 1920. In 1931 graduated from the Art academy, majoring in painting in the class of professor Tzeno Todorov. Creative career began in the 20s in the area of picturesque-decorative work and in 1930s with applied art (layout, advertisements, labels, posters) - his preferred techniques being pastel and oil paints. In 1931-32 he taught drawing in male high school in Sofia and, from 1934 and 1945, taught internal architecture and style in Rousse. Worked as art director in Rousse dramatic theatre (1945-48), Youth Theatre in Sofia (1948-52) and the National Theatre "Ivan Vazov" (from 1952 year). http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=204
Karasimeonov, Todor	1889-1937	Caracatures - of intellectuals of Kaz and Burgas	Born Kazanlak 1906-1917 State Art School 1918-22 Gabrovo 1922 Burgas
Karshovski, Preslav	1905-2003	Landscape graphics	graduated from Sofia art institute 1927 also did theatrical design, posters, book illustrations impressionst style 1950-57 Director of the National Gallery

			Classic paintings of Sofia
Kavaldjiev, Vladimir	1908-1988	domestic compositions, portraits and landscapes.	born in Veliko Tarnovo. He graduated in 1932 Art Academy in Sofia under Prof. Zeno Todorov. In the beginning the coloring is restrained by the time Vladimir Kavaldjiev switch to brighter tones. Created works under the influence of socialist realism: "Cooperative flock" (1950), "In the stables" (1939) "Tractor-drivers noon" (1960, Varna Art gallery), "For freedom - Turnovo", "Smolyan weaving" etc. http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=27
Kavarnaliev, Hristo 1892-1951 Aquarellist Particularly seascapes Graduated Sofia Art School 1915. He studied under Prof. Ivan Markvichka, Anton Mitov, Ivan Angelov and Jaroslav Vesin Travelled across Russia, Italy, France, etc. Victoria Gallery has a good archive of his paintings 900 euros 70x100			
Kazakov, Dimitar (Neron)	1933-1992	folk	born in Village in Veliko Tarnovo. Graduated in graphic arts from the Art Academy in Sofia under Prof. Evtim Tomov in 1965. He created paintings, prints and wood carvings, depicting uniquely folk motives in his works. Since 1966 he participated in art exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad. s. During his lifetime Kazakov made big donations to the towns of Lovech and Tryavna, which have permanent exhibitions of his works. Works don't often appear - and will cost upwards of 5,000 euros
Kazandziev, Christo	1874-1952	Genre Still-life	Born Shumen - schooled in Kazanluk Studied art in Munich 1896-98 Art teacher Varna 1905 Sofia Art School 10 years teaching Shumen
Kiureliev Jordan	1877-1910	landscape	born Sliven superb painter whose life was cut tragically short when he drowned in the Black Sea
Klintcharev Efgeni	1926-2013		Born Sofia graduated in Mural Painting from the Academy of Art in Sofia

			in 1948, under Kiril Tsonev and Georgi Bogdanov. Between 1953 and 1985, he was chief artist of the Bulgarian Artist Publishing House and deputy editor-in-chief of 'Izkustvo' [Art] magazine (1962-1970). From 1963 to 1989, he was a member of the Board of the Union of Bulgarian Artists. He participated in many exhibitions of fine, applied and monumental arts. Author of monographs on the artists Ivan Nenov, Lyuben Gaydarov, Todor Panayotov, Kiril Kazanlakliev, and Katerina Savova-Nenova, the book 'Conversations with Ivan Nenov', and numerous articles on artistic issues. The trilogy 'Pantheon. Prominent Figures of Bulgarian Culture', printed in 2010-2013, was his last major work. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGi9wxLaqYA
Klisurov, Petko	1865-1933	Portraits, genre, still life	Born Kazanlak 1884-88 Florence Academy of Arts For next decade, a high school teacher of arts at Kazanlak, Sliven, Varna, Plovdiv and Sofia 1911-1920 National School of Drawing
Klisurova Petrana	1908-1995	Graphics portrait Still life	Born Stara Zagora Trained by her brother Vasil Barakov, accepted in Sofia art school in 1932 where she studies under T Todorov 39-45 art teacher in Sofia then settled in Sofia Main themes were workers and intellectuals 1952 appointed senior associate in National Gallery
Kodjamanov, Tihomir	1892-1975	landscapes, portraits	Born Gabrovo, schooled Vidin. In 1913 graduated at the Art Industrial School, Sofia, with Professor Ivan Mrkvicka. Specializes in Vienna from 1923 to 1925 He worked primarily with landscapes - his preferred subjects are the coast of Danube. Author and portraits. Long worked as a teacher in Vidin. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=208
Koichev, Ganyo	1887-1951	landscape	Born Kazanlak 1910-1914 Sofia Art school From 1918 Harmanli 1948 retired to Plovdiv
Kolev, Boris	1906-1986	Landscape, portrait,	born Kyustendil. Graduated 1932 from Sofia Art Academy.

		figurative	Also art historian and critic
Kolev, Kolyo	1905-1950	Landscape Graphic	Born Kazanlak Thick complex technique; Rhodope mountains focus Initially worked woodcuts... Committed suicide while trying to finish a commission of a partisan painting.... http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=284 Another favourite of mine 400 euros;

Konsulova-Vazova Elizabeth



1881-1965

Portraits

born in Plovdiv. In 1902 graduated the second alumni of the Arts school, in the class of Jaroslav Vesin.

Between 1909 and 1910, she specialized in portraiture in Munich Academy.

Her first exhibition in 1919 in Sofia is the first solo exhibition of female artist in Bulgaria.

Exhibitions then followed in Prague (1931), Plzen and Bratislava (1932) and again in Sofia in 1934 and 1956.

She prefers techniques such as pastel, oil and watercolor. She leaves many paintings of flowers and is also the first Bulgarian female artist painting the nude body

Konsulova Vazova is one of the founders of the association "Native Art".

Develops social activities as an editor of "Lecture" magazine (1934-40)

and the "Home and World" magazine (1940-43); cooperates with the magazines "Artist" and "Art" with art critical articles on Bulgarian and western fine arts.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=257>

Konstantinova Danka	1894-1973		Born Sliven Entered Sofia Art school in 1909 and studies under Mrchvka, Stefan Ivanov and Tzeno Todorov Had her first exhibition (with Vasil Zahariev) in 1920 in Sofia
Kosev, Dimitar	1904-1980	Landscape, genre	Born Dryanovo 1929 graduated 1936 teacher Kazanlak http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=324 +
Kostakev, Vasil	1885-1933	Portrait landscape	Born Kazanlak 1903 Sofia Art School Graduated 1910 1919-early 20s visited Rome, Florence and Venice 1919-1932 taught at Stara Zagora

Kostov-Andonov Nikola	1887-1981		Superb painter of BG peasant life http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=117
Kostova-Vladeva Radka	1907-2002	Landscapes Still life portrait	Born Shipka 1931 graduated Teacher 1932 Burgas Donated work to Shipka
Kozuharov, Nikola	1892-1971	portraits	born Kazanlak but raised in Stara Zagora where his father was a teacher and founder of the Regional Museum. Studied under Tseno Todorov in Sofia and in Paris 1914/15. Was war artist. In 1920s and 1930s specialised in national historical scenes. Worked for the king From 1929-63 he was Professor at Academy of Arts. 1963/67 he was head of Dept at Higher Institute of Education VT ArtBG has a few examples of his work http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=264
Kozuharova, Nevena	1892-1979	portrait	http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=907 http://www.values-gallery.com/galleries/browse/7
Krastev, Mihai	1877-1956	graphics	Born Pirot - studies Drawing School Sofia 1899-1902. Taught at Karlovo HS - then from 1910 lived in Plovdiv for a decade - then from 1920 at the High School for Girls Sofia. Retired in 1931 and devoted himself to graphic studies of literary and artistic figures - and sketches of Bulgarian streets and buildings.
Krastev, Kiril Vasilev	1904-1947	Graphic artist	born in Yambol. Eventually he graduated in 1930 natural sciences. In 1938-39 specializes Art in Paris. Literary critic, essayist, scientific popularizer, artist. Kiri Krastev is a great figure in Bulgarian Art - issued monographs on Sirak Sktinik, Bencho Obreshkov. Researched the frescoes in the Boyana Church, the Zemen monastery. Wrote works on Michelangelo's "Understanding Painting", 1947 Sofia City Gallery has a nice bilingual monograph on him
Krilov, Ivan	1878???	aquarelle	Born Russia - lived in Bulgaria from ???

Ionchev, Christo (Kriskarets)

1879-1950

Aquarelles Mountains

Born and lived Samokov.

Graduated in 1912 from Sofia Art School where his teachers were Prof. Ivan Angelov and Professor Ivan Mrkvicka.

Working mainly in the landscape field he uses watercolour, tempera and oil he organizes many exhibitions in Sofia and Samokov. His famous works are the series "Landscapes from Rila" (1936).



In 1931 took part in the founding of the Hi-storical Museum in Samokov city and subsequently worked as a museum curator.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=116>

500 euros

Kutev, Hristo	1869-1943	Portraits, landscape	Born Shipka; graduated VT (teacher a Czech) Settled Krakow Tatra scenes In 1950 his wife donated 50 of his paintings to Bulgaria
Kutzkarov, Dimitar	1885-1963	aquarelle	born Stara Zagora and graduated 1908 from State Academy where he studied under Mrkvichka. Then teacher in SZ; 1918-1927 teacher in Yambol, Pleven, Svishtosh and SZ. In 1927 appointed to Berkovitz where he settled permanently and where more than 1000 of his works are housed at the Art Gallery

Lavrenov, Tsanko

1896-1978

Born Plovdiv

No formal education

vivid and mystical portrayal of monasteries and cities



Lazarov, Alexander	1880-1966	portraits	Several in Russe gallery
Lazarov,	1889-1952	sculptor	Born Karlovo. 1917/18 Munich Art Academy.

Ivan			Mid 1920s travelled in Europe. 1924 became Professor at the Sofia Art School - 1950-52, the first Director of the Art Academy One of the most sensitive sculptors - of peasants, soldiers etc
Lazarov, Miladin	1894-1985	portraits, landscapes	graduated 1916 from Sofia Art School http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=314
Lozev, Hristo	1883-1970	Landscape figures	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=279
Lukova, Vera 1907-1974  Modernist portraitist born Plovdiv. Graduated 1930 from the Art School sofia - under Boris Mitov 1931 winner of Sofia prize 1932 gold medal Paris http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=194			
Makedonski, Dimitar	1914-1993	Figures, landscapes	1944 graduated from Sofia Art School 1945-65 Curator of Sofia City gallery
Mandov, Dechko	1886-1969	Portrait, genre, landscape	Born Karnovat. Childhood Shipka 1912 graduated Sofia art school Brothers Ssettled in Sofia 1920s 900 euros 55x75 - not sold
Mandov Radomir	1883-1947.	gentle landscapes and genre.	born Kazanlak. studied (1903-08) painting in art school , Sofia studied under Professor Ivan Angelov and Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka . Settled in Sofia 1914 Member of the Society "Modern Art brothers
Manski, Vladimir	1905-1969	Urban landscapes	Born Vidin He graduated from the Academy of Arts in Sofia in 1938, major art of painting, the class of Dechko Uzunov. He created a number of urban and industrial landscapes. He worked in various formats and employed all techniques: oil

			paints, water-colour, Indian ink. He painted a lot of compositions devoted to daily life and building. Manski is one of the masters of colouring in the Bulgarian landscape. From 1941 he participated in general art exhibitions, the exhibitions of the Bulgarian artists, exhibitions abroad, and organized 4 individual exhibitions in Sofia /1946, 1953, 1964, 1965
Marinov, Ianko	1907-2001	seascape	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=203
Marinov, Nikola	1879-1948	aquarelles	1903 graduated from Turin Art Academy 1921-40 Professor of Painting at Sofia
Marinov Vasil	1897-1943	landscape, genre	born Stara Zagora, Graduated Sofia's Drawing School in 1907 where he studied under Vesin and Mrkvichka. Teacher at Stara Zagora Delightful colourist War artist. Painted some of the largest canvasses about scenes of everyday life...
Marinova, Russka	1899-1994	portrait	born Samokov. 1919 graduated from Industrial School of Arts, Sofia, under Professor. Zeno Todorov and prof. Stefan Ivanov. In the year of her graduation had first solo exhibition in Sofia - primarily portraits. From 1927 to 1931 lived in Paris. Painted mostly portraits in pastel. Participated in collective exhibitions in the French capital, including the "grand salon" 1927 Solo exhibition in Paris in 1929. In Bulgaria created several thematic cycles portraits; portrait of public figures, historical figures, artists, entertainers, scientists. She was awarded a gold medal at the Paris Exhibition (1937 and many other honours
Markov, Marko	1889-1966	sculptor	Born in village of Varbitsa (near Veliko Tarnovo) In 1903 exckuded from school for having organised a mutiny amongst the pupils and worked as gardener in Romania - the Bucharest Art Academy apparently wouldn't take him so he enrolled in Sofia's School of Art where he followed the drawing classes of the great Stefan Ivanov and Tseno Todorov. He finished his studies in 1915 at the top of his class - but thereafter had some difficulties in making a living. In 1924 he won a prize for bust/portraits which allowed him to go to Paris where he frequented the Julian Academy and became familiar with the work of the scuptors - particularly Bouchard who put him in charge of his workshsop. In 1927 he returned to Bulgaria and caught attention with his

			bust/portrait of the painter Nikolay Rainov – and he soon was being seen as the country's premier sculptor although his hopes for the chair in sculpture fell through. With the communists in power, the commissions for monumental works got underway and his reputation was established..
Mashev Georgi	1887-1946	Portrait,	Born Pazardzhik 1906 entered Sofia art school 1908 Expelled because of criticism of Prof Klisurov's conservative teaching style 1908-1909 St Petersburg Academy of Arts 1909-10 Brussels 1910-12 finished art training in Sofia with Profs Marchvicka, Stefan Ivanov and Ivan Angelov 1914-15 teacher in Tsarebrod 1915-18 military painter in Cavalry division 1918-21 teacher in Pazarzhik 1923-1937 Ministry of Education 1930/31 Paris 1937-1944 free lance painter in Sofia 1944-46 Pazardzhik
Mateev, Kyril	1920-2006	Alpine	Born Dmitrigrad graduated 1945 in mural painting from Uzonov's class. A prolific painter http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=138 300 euros

Mechkuevska, Alexandra

1907-1993
Seascape

born Burgas.

She was a member of Union of Bulgarian Artists since 1945.
From 1934 participated in group exhibitions and exhibitions of women artists, in Paris – Exhibition/1937/, Belgrad/1938/, Cairo/1938/, Alexandria/1939/; individual exhibitions in Burgas /1934, 1936, 1948/, Sofia/1935, 1937, 1945, 1947/, Plovdiv/1936/, Kazanlak/1937/.



She was awarded a medal at the Paris Exhibition /1937

Another of my favourite artists – hence the tribute below
This one is 1,500 euros

Her first art teacher was Gencho Mitev, who also had educated prominent artists such as Petko Zadgorski, Mara Tsoncheva and others.

In 1933 Ms. Mechkuevska graduated from the Art Academy in Sofia with two majors: Decorative Art by prof.Nikola Kozhuharov and prof.Haralampi Tachev and Graphic arts by prof.Vasil Zahariev. Alexandra Mechkuevska's legacy is a mixture of oil painting

maritime landscapes and still life with flowers.

In the period 1934-1936 the young female artist participated in numerous exhibitions in Burgas. She is among the participants of the first joint art exhibition in Burgas. At that time the city didn't have a real gallery hall for art exhibitions, so in 1935, the artists combine their efforts for a second joint exhibition displayed in two rooms of the Girls' High School. Withstanding the indifference of the Burgas audience, Mechkuevska was among the participants once again. In this difficult time the city artists were forced to sell their works at very low price enough to cover the cost of materials.

In 1936 the talented Ms. Mechkuevska set up an exhibition in the hall of Alliance Francaise in Burgas, displaying mostly landscapes from Sozopol, Rila Monastery and the Balkan Mountains. Two years after her graduation from of the Academy of Fine Arts (1935), she made her first solo exhibition in Sofia Art Gallery "Aksakov" in 1936 another solo exhibition followed in Plovdiv. According to connoisseurs, The Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne (International Exposition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life) was held in 1937 in Paris, France and was the world's largest expo to date. Here, Alexandra Mechkuevska is awarded The Medal of female artists. This recognition opens the world for talented young lady, followed by her international exhibitions in Belgrade (1938), Cairo (1939) and Alexandria (1939).

During the period 1938-39 Mechkuevska met with the young scientist Michael Venedikov, a descendant of an old, famous Macedonian family Venedikts from the area of Razlog, village Banya. On 1.10.1939 the couple married in Sofia. However the family Venedikovi wasn't fond of the daughter in law, who was an artist painting all day long instead of doing her housework and the two divorced not long after. In 1942 Alexandra gave her ex-husband a picture with the inscription: "With tears of a huge broken love."

By the end of her life Mechkuevska proffered to be alone. Although she lived in Sofia every summer she would return to her hometown. In 1948 she held her third solo exhibition - this time in Burgas.

In 1978 Mechkuevska was awarded the Order of Cyril and Methodius - 1st class.

She is known as the Bulgarian George Sand. A free and open minded woman for her time, from early spring until late autumn, she lived and worked in Sozopol.

Krasimira Dubarova http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=428

Mihailov Boris	1868-1921	landscapes	Born Kazanluk Graduated Plovdiv ? (under Mrchvicka) 1887-92 Florence Academy of Art 1892- art teacher in Sliven and Sofia 1901 Superb touch http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=40
Mihailov, Rafael	1902-1969	landscapes, portraits and still lifes	Born Tarnovo Graduated (1934) Painting at the Art Academy in Sofia. His tutors are Iv. Angelov, Haralampy Tachev, Dechko Ouzounov. Creates dense painting in a very small format / 60 cm /, which synthesizes different artistic styles. Rafael Mihaylov does not belong to any art school has a unique style oppredelen by some art critics as metaphysical painting . Rafael Mikhailov depicts each subject using the artistic style of the era in which the object was created. Thus, each subject has its own space and time, and each form has its place. His first works are expressive and colorful watercolors

			depicting landscapes and compositions rural life From 1935 to 1961 he was a teacher in the province and Sofia. Member of the Society of New Artists. After 1934 Rafael Mihaylov given to creating oil painting landscapes, still lifes and interiors. His paintings from this period are subtle and lyrical Writes in Zia, and in 1967 issued a poetry book "Moments." Rafael Mihaylov is considered the father of the so-called. "Metaphysical painting" - trend in European art from the 30s - 40s. The aim is to create a painting that is independent of the time. Its versatility lies not in the presentation of bits and other details that lead to a specific era. After Rafael Mihailov in this style work Magda Abazova , Vasil Barakov .
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Mihailov Nikola

1876-1960

portrait

Born in Shumen.

One of the founders of a realistic portrait painting in Bulgaria.

He began studying painting in Sofia art academy with Professor [Ivan Mrkvicka](#) .

In 1895 went to study in private art schools in Athens and Munich. Opens School of painting in Munich (1900).



Portrait of Ivan Vazov

Teacher in Sofia (1902) and became a painter of the Ministry of Education and was, for a time, a court painter. Specializing in Paris and London, where he continued to learn, making copies in museums.

In 1911 returned to Germany and lived as a freelance artist in Berlin and Hamburg. A lot of his paintings were destroyed when his Berlin home was bombed in 1945.....

Travelled almost all his life, staying briefly in a country. Painted portraits in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Italy, England, Austria.

Nikola Mihaylov devotes a large part of his painting to women. Female characters are complemented by the interior and clothes painted by master sweeping drapes and folds

He painted portraits of cultural personalities (including Hitler, Mussolini and Goebbels!!)



Mihov, Atanas

1879-1975
Landscapes

One of my favourites.....

Born Stara Zagora. Graduated 1904 from Drawing School, Sofia where he studied under vesin and Mrkvichka. One of initiators of Bulgarian impressionist painting. 1906-09 teacher in Silistra; 1910-12 Razgrad; 1918-23 Russe. War artist during Balkan War and First WW. Settled in Sofia 1923 where he worked in Knyazhevo until 1932

The gradual escape from subject painting, with which Atanas

Mihov begins, in favour of the pure landscape, is noticed in 1908 when at the International Fair in Munich he receives a golden medal and honorary diploma for best painter, where he participates with his two emblematic paintings *The Ices of the Danube* and *By Silistra*, kept in the National Gallery of Art at the moment.

This recognition which he does not make public at all, gives him the confidence to devote his life entirely to art, so steadily that after almost twenty years of teaching in the country, he devoted himself solely to painting in his house in Knyazhevo and to participating in exhibits. Thus was among the participants in exhibitions in Munich, Liège, Venice, Prague, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Rome and many others.

Examples at pp 15-19 of [130 selected works from the BNB collection](#)

Also <http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=125>

1,000 euros 50x40

Mikrenski, Constantin	1921-1999	Aquarelles	http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=34
Milanov, Ivan	1928-		Graduated 1950 from Sofia Art Academy under Ilyia Petrov
Milenkov, Alexander	1882-1971		Born Samokov 1906 painted murals an stage work in Munich. First professional stage artist
Milev, Ivan	1897-1927		Born Kazanluk. Regarded as the founder of the Bulgarian Secession and a representative of Bulgarian modernism, combining symbolism, Art Nouveau and expressionism in his work. In 1917-1918, he fought as a soldier in WW1. In 1920, he was admitted to Sofia Art School, He also contributed to the communist comic magazine Red Laughter as an illustratir and cartoonist In the summer of 1923, he visited Turkey, Greece and Italy with a group of fellow students.. In 1926, he graduated in set decoration from the National Academy and worked as a stage designer. Afterwards he became an independent freelance painter and illustrator and he

			also painted frescoes. Generally living in poverty, Milev had a brief 18-month marriage to opera singer Katya Naumova; their daughter Mariya Mileva eventually became an architect. Regarded as one of the great masters of distemper and watercolour painting in Bulgarian art, Milev often created socially-loaded works. His characteristic decorative style was much influenced by the European Secession, but it was also related to Bulgarian folk art and icon painting. http://www.ivan-milev.com/bulgarian-modernism.htm
Milidzhiyska Margarita	1910-2001	portrait	Born VT region 1931 entered Sofia Art School Under Marinov Graduated 1936 39-45 lived P azhardik where she taught at Boy's school 49-74 taught Russian
Minkov, Laliu	1911-1985	Urban landscape	600 euros 75x63 http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=286
Mirchev, Nikola Stoilov	1921- 1973	portraiture and cartoonist .	Born in the town of Kyustendil in 1921 Joined NAA in 1940, but due to lack of funds interrupted his studies. He graduated from the Academy of Arts in 1948 in the class of Prof. Ilia Petrov in painting pursuing socialist realist work. He was a member of the UBA from 1948 and Secretary of the UBA in the periods from 1953 to 1955 and from 1963 to 1965 and Chairman of UBA from 1970 to 1973 during his tenure as Chairman of UBA built exhibition complex "Shipka " № 6 in Sofia in 1970 in 1971 he was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party . Nikola Mirchev is one of the founders of the " Hornet ." He paints portraits of Todor Zhivkov , Lenin Dzerzhinski , people from his family and a famous one called "Interrogation" (1954). Created posters and cartoons on foreign policy issues. Illustrated many books. Nikola Mirchev was twice winner of the Dimitrov Prize. In 1970 he was awarded the title " People's Artist" . Nikola Mirchev is the father of artist Ivaylo Mirchev , chairman of the UBA 2004 Nikola Mirchev died in 1973 in Paris, where he was receiving treatment.
Mirchev, Ivaylov	1954		Son of Nikola (above)

Mitov, Anton

1862-1930

genre, war, portrait, landscape

Born Stara Zagora.

Graduated Florence 1885.

Worked as teacher in Stara Zagora, Varna, Plovdiv and Sofia.

1896-1927 Prof of History of art and Perspectives, Art Academy Sofia (its Director 1912-18 and 1924-27).

Author of first book on history of art written in Bulgarian. Co-founder of Society in Support of Bulgarian Art in 1893.

Among his most famous works are : " Return of the vintage ", " Market Grape Evksinograd near Varna ", " Goldsmith the Sofia market ", " From the Sofia market ", " Group of farmers market in Sofia ", " group of peasants market in Silistra ", " Portrait of Ivan Mrkvicka ", " Self-Portrait " .

Author of the first seascape in Bulgarian painting : " Varna port ", " Varna beach ", " Varna Sea. "

Actively participate in the socio- cultural and political life and manifests as passionate publicist .



Constantly traveling around the country to export reports and interviews because he believed that art should become closer to ordinary people. While writing art criticism, painting murals in churches and monasteries , as well as illustrations for novels such as " Under the Yoke" and barely has time to rest. Long before his death in 1930, he was recognized not only as one of our greatest artists, but also one of the greatest patriots . Managed to cultivate the spirit of art and his son Boris (1891-1963) , who also became a famous artist, lecturer and professor at the Art Academy .

<http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1862-1930.html>

Mitov, Boris	1891-1963	portraits	Born Varna - son of the famous Bulgarian artist Anton Mitov , his mother Olga Hramtsova is Russian. Born in Varna, where his father at that time was a teacher. In 1894 , when he was three years old , the family moved to Sofia. Boris began to paint as a child and participated in exhibitions from age of fifteen . He studied with Professor Ivan Angelov in Industrial School of Arts - Sofia. In 1911 graduated from the general course and went to Paris where he remained until 1914 , working with Professor Fernand Kormon and attended the Academy of Fine Arts. Completed the artistic education under Ivan Mrkvicka in 1915. During World War I was a military artist (1915-1918) . Lecturer (1924-1929) and professor (1929-1959) in drawing and painting at the Art Academy in Sofia. Works in portrait and nude. One of the prominent Bulgarian portrait , created portraits of his father, Anton Mitov , Ivan Shishmanov Dobri Hristov , Sava Ognianov , Elin Pelin, Georgi Dimitrov and many other famous Bulgarians
Mitov, Georgi	1875-1900		Born Stara Zagora - Brother of the painter Anton Mitov. . Died only 24 years old and therefore leaves little heritage - landscapes, portraits, nudes and academic study. These show the hand of the great artist, plastic craftsmanship and

			sophisticated sense of colour. Graduated (1898) painting at the Art Academy in Turin gold medal with Prof. Giacomo Grosso. He returned home and until his death he taught drawing in Gabrovo, Plovdiv (1898-1900)
Monev, Marko	1939-2004	Landscapes; buildings	born in village in Pleven and moved in 1959 to Russe
Moneva, Vasilka	1945-	Primitivist style	Born Russe After high school, studied window dressing; then worked as a puppet-maker at Russe puppet theatre Married Marko in 1966 and since then dedicated herself to art - with the Russe group of painters Most recent exhibition April 2015 - when I was lucky enough to meet her and take some pictures you can see on my flickr account

Morozov, Peter



1880-1951
Romantic landscape

Born Russe
1905-1915 specialised in graphic art in Paris
Graduated in painting under professors Ivan Markvicka, Yaroslav Veshin and Ivan Angelov from the Art Academy in Sofia in 1905.

From 1905 to 1915 he specialized in graphic arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, at the Art Academy in Sofia and under Joseph Peter.

The artist participated in the Balkan War and the World War I.

He began his artistic career as painter but gradually devoted himself to printing and he contributed significantly to its development in Bulgaria and to colour aquatint in particular.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=41>

He created hundreds of works depicting ancient Bulgarian monasteries, churches, houses and bridges,

Moutafov, Alexander

1879-1957

Seascape

born in Shumen and educated in Varna, he studied art in Turin between 1899 and 1902; then Munich 1902/03.

He was also a war artist

It was the Munich experience which aroused his interest in Jugendstil.

From 1921-33, he was professor of Painting in Sofia's Art Academy.

First Bulgarian seascape painter, he laid the basis for this specialism for subsequent Bulgarian painters.

During the Balkan wars and World War Mutafov he was appointed military artist-correspondent of the Fourth Infantry Preslav Division, which operated in Dobrudzha.



Later, at his request, he was transferred to the Black Sea Fleet at Varna where he painted with watercolor and ink works which are now located in the National Museum of Military History. Among them are the famous "Night battle over village Balabanča", "The onslaught of the 7th Infantry Regiment", "Preslavians in battle", "Opalchentsi" "After mobilization."

Over the next decade Mutafov finally moving towards seascapes and compositions depicting the lives of sailors and fishermen. In 1954 he was awarded the Order "Red Banner of Labor." Mutafov works are owned by the National Art Gallery, Sofia City Art Gallery, Galleries in Plovdiv, Haskovo, Sliven and other towns of the country, as well as private collections in Bulgaria and abroad.

About 60 of his works are kept in his studio in Sozopol, built in 1937 and converted after the death of the artist in the museum.

Murkvichka Ivan



1856-1938

Military scenes; rural life

born Czechia and studied art in Prague.

Came to Plovdiv in 1881 and moved to Sofia in 1889.

1896 co-founder of Academy of art. Prof of Painting there until 1921.

Became member of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1918 and edited book in 1929 on Bulgarian painting but returned to Prague about 1937

<http://bnr.bg/fr/post/100696769/ivan-markvitchka-1856-1938-et-le-renouveau-dans-peinture-bulgare>

prices minimum of 25,000

Naidenov, Grigor

1885-1983

Café scenes

aquarelle

One of my real favourites...

1919 graduated from Sofia art school under Profs Stefan Ivanov and Tseno Todorov

		1972 won the Sofia art prize http://artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=180 http://auction-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=229	
Naumov, Vladimir	1897-?	Rural scenes	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=312
Nedkova, Vera	1908-1996	Figurative compositions, portraits, landscapes	Skopje 1924-30 vienna https://www.24chasa.bg/Article/1521482
Nenov, Ivan	1902-1997	portraits, landscape	born Sofia but family moved in 1908 to Vidin and in 1914 to Kyustendil where he met Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistora. On returning to Sofia in late teens he was influenced and helped by Ivan Lazarov and was accepted in 1919 as an extra-curricular student in scupting at the Art School - becoming a full-time student in painting 1920-25 (Marinov). Worked and lived extensively in Italy from 1932 1937-41 sofia 1945-50 Leecturer at Sofia Achool of Art 1950 forced out of the School and of painting - moved into ceramics 1960 was rehabilitated... Founded the studio for mosaics in the Art School. Preferred tempera
Nikolov, Damian 1898-1958 Genre; portraits Born near Burgas; graduated 1929 from Sofia Art Academy under Stefan Ivanov 1933-35 Paris spent time in Prague 			

Nikolov, Kipro	1897-1975	Sculpture, ceramics, painting	Graduated from Sofia art School In 1920s art teacher in Stara Zagora - with preference for aquarelle Early 60s, returned to Sofia
Obreshkov Bencho	1899-1970	Fig, still life, landscapes	Born Karnovat. Studied under Oskar Kokoshka in Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden in 1926 and sculpture under Antoine Bourdelle , Paris in 1925 - 1927. He was a member of the "Native Arts" Union (1925), a member of the Union of the New Artists (1931) One of Bulgaria's great modernists Amazing he was allowed!!
Obretenov, Alexander	1878-1945	landscape	Born Lom Studied art in Odessa, St Petersburg and Moscow; started 1904 in Munich art school and then Berlin, returning 1913 to Bulgaria to take part in the Balkan and First World Wars and then taking up a position at Lom High School which he held until he was pensioned off..
Panaoimov			
Panayotov, Panayot	1909-1986	Portraits landscapes	Graduated Sofia Art school under Nikola Marinov Professor of Painting at thw Sofia Art Academy
Paprikova, Zoya	1902-51	landscapes, still life, portrait, nude.	Born Sofia. For three years (1921-1923) studied painting at Sofia Art School, prof. Nikola Marinov , then went to Florence, where she graduated (1926) with Prof.. Felice Carena. She turns colour into a major force and through building the atmosphere in her paintings, gives individuality of each subject. In 1937, she received the Gold Medal of the World Exhibition in Paris
Parov, Stefan	1905-1971	Landscape, genre, portrait	Born Kazanlak Graduated 1931 - then teacher Kaz Settled Sofia early 1950s; taught at Sofia art school
Parvev, Grigor	1921-		Born Draganovo, near Veliko Tarnovo Sent to be a gardiner in Austria and returned to VK to finish his schooling Graduated from Sofia art school in 1951 1952 charged with sedition and sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment

			After his release, taught at Kardzhali high school but accused of not teaching socialist realism and sent to a mine! Then settled in Troyan where he worked as an artist in the local cinema; wrote stories and acted in the local theatre. He was refused membership of the Bulgarian Union of Artists Rediscovered only after 1990
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Pascin, Jules

1885-1930

graphic artist

born Vidin to a rich family (grain trader, family moved to Russe when he was young and he completed his (secondary) education in Brasov (Romania).

His early talent drew the attention of the famous caricaturist Alexander Bozhinov but he never attended art school.

Some of his drawings appeared in the renowned German satirical journal *Simplicissimus* when he was only 21. After unsuccessful attempts to involve him in the family business, he moved to Paris in 1905 where - with various forays to the USA and Caribbean, he remained until his suicide.

<http://www.shepherdgallery.com/pdf/pascin.pdf>

From It's About Time <http://bjws.blogspot.ro/2012/10/a-wife-lover-painted-by-european.html>

Born as Julius Mordecai Pincas of Italian-Serbian & Spanish-Jewish parents, he attended secondary school in Vienna, returning in 1901 to Bucharest, where his family had settled, working briefly in the office of his father's grain-merchandizing business.

He was, however, becoming passionately interested in drawing, for which he showed precocious talent. At the age of 16, he became the lover of a woman who ran a brothel & was allowed to draw the residents. In 1903, he moved to Munich, where he attended the art school run by Moritz Heymann.

After Pascin moved to Paris in 1905, he became a central figure in the social & cultural life of the cafes & studios of Montparnasse. At the outbreak of World War I, he lived in the United States from 1914 to 1920, sitting out World War I. He taught at the Telfair Academy in Savannah, Georgia, associated with the Telfair Art Museum. He & Hermine painted in New York City as well as in Miami, New Orleans, & Cuba.

Pascin married Hermine David at City Hall in New York City. The witnesses were fellow artists Max Weber (???) & Maurice Sterne. Pascin became a citizen of the United States.

Returning to Paris in 1920, he continued to compose paintings of delicately toned, thinly painted, but poetically bitter & ironic studies of women - including his wife, his mistress, & some prostitute acquaintances.

Although Pascin's watercolors, oils, and drawings were generally well received, a series of unfavorable reviews in 1930 left him severely depressed. Suffering from depression & alcoholism, he committed suicide on the eve of a prestigious solo show by slitting his wrists & hanging himself in his studio in Montmartre. On the wall of that studio, he left a message written in his blood saying good-bye to his love, Cecile "Lucy" Vidil Krohg. In his will, Pascin left his estate equally to his mistress, Lucy Krohg, & to his wife, Hermine David.

<http://www.lonbersyl.com/pascin%20a.html>



Pavlovich, Nikolai	1835-1894	historical	born in Svishtov. Son of the famous Renaissance figure Hristaki Pavlovich , one of the great educationists of the early Renaissance , was able to raise and an excellent way his son. He managed to earn money and ultimately collect the necessary sum to follow illustrations in Vienna. He continued his education in Munich , where he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts. Love for Bulgaria determines the future of the artist. Rather than remain in Germany , where he would enjoy a peaceful and secure life , Nicholas Pavlovich decided to return home , saying : "I wanted to give to his people as my powers permit, something of my profession - he wrote in a letter of 1860 - will look to picturize glorious deeds of our kings " Thus Pavlovich became the first master of the historical genre in Bulgaria. Later he stated that through his paintings not only wanted to evoke admiration but also to influence the people to make them love you even more Bulgaria. Started helping by her talent and the national liberation movement - moved to Belgrade, where he met George GS Rakovski and illustrates his book After the liberation Nikolai Pavlovich refused to take part in the management of the state. Instead became a teacher and taught some of the future artists of Bulgaria ,joining as a volunteer in the Serbo- Bulgarian War.
Penkov, Ivan 1897-1957  born Kazanluk - moved to Burgas in 1915 when his father dies. Studied at art school in Sofia 1919-1922. After a joint exhibition with Uzunov (with Milev a childhood friend), both travelled to Munich where he stayed a year and was influenced by Jugendstil and by German architecture. On his return to Bulgaria in 1923, he worked with theatre decorations. From 1939-1955 he was Professor of Theatre decoration at Sofia Art Academy.			
Peretz, David	1906-82	portrait, still-life, landscape	born Plovdiv. From 1936 travelled in Europe. Spent a year during the war in a concentration camp
Peters, Kurt			http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=115
Pessov, Hristo	1923-2000	sculptor	born Kazanluk

Petkov, Naiden	1918-1989	Landscapes,	Born Vidrare village, Sofia 1937-42 studied Sofia Art Academy 1961 travelled India for a couple of months 1978 month in Italy From 1978 Professor at Sofia Art Academy 1981/82 travelled in Russia and America His work exactly spanned the communist period – and has, for me, the darkness one associated with the times
Petrov, Boyan	1902-1971	portraits and figure composition	born Sofia. Graduated from Sofia Art School 1928. Early 1930s worked in France and Italy. 1934-1948 worked in various schools in Bulgaria and became teacher at Sofia Art School from 1948
Petrov, Costa	??	old village scenes	lived in Razgrad area

Petrov, Ilia

1903-1975

Graphics Populated landscapes

born Razgrad; Sofia Art Academy 1921-26 – latterly under Prof. Nikola Marinov. Won the competition in 1926 and went on to specialize in Munich. 1928 to attend the private school of Heinrich Mann and learn from the masters of the world of painting (Art Academy). Gave an exhibition there in 1928. On his way back to BG did an extended tour of German cities, France, Austria and Italy to become acquainted with European traditions.

1941-1967 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy. 1961 visited India
Art teacher (1928 - 1940) Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts (1957-1962)
and Rector (1965- 1968), the Academy , and in 1972 became academician.
/ Encyclopedia of BAS

After the seizure of power on September 9 1944 by the communists he took an active part in the management of UBA and was its Secretary-General (1949-1951 and 1957-1959). Makes mural frieze ' to 1944 ' in the lobby of the theater Sofia "Dimitar Blagoev" (1946 , the frieze "From the struggles of the party in the region of Gabrovo " Party House in Gabrovo (1963) . participate in the work of " Monument to the Soviet Army " in Sofia. Began to work the works of historical revolutionary themes : " Guerrillas in action " (1974 , National Gallery) , " Before shooting " (1954 , National Gallery) , " Partisan Song" (1959 , National Gallery) , " The Messenger " (1963 , National Gallery) and dr.Ot that time compositions "Fishermen " (1948 , National Gallery) , " Fishing women" (1948) and , but his true virtuosity seen in naked bodies , where he remains one of our greatest artists.



Left a tremendous amount paintings - portrait sketches, animals , some of which still have not been displayed in public. They impress his acute observation and expressive language.
Makes several attempts at sculpture



Petrov, Ivan

1909-1991

Fig and landscape

Born on 17th September 1909 in village Razpopovci.

He graduated from the Academy of Arts in Sofia in 1931 and became Professor at the Academy of Arts in Sofia

Petrov, Kiril

1897-1979

Born Lom

Genre, landscapes (peasants)

1926 graduated Sofia art school under Nikola Marinov

1934 exhibition in Gallery Preslav, Sofia

1937 gold medal the International Exhibition in Paris

1943-44 participated in the Second World War

1946 solo exhibition in the Ethnographic Museum in Sofia. Critics called it "formalistic and decadent", Despite his family background (his brother being killed in the September uprising of 1923) he was actually listed for execution during this terrible period of killings and "disappearing", then a change was made,

He doesn't participate in exhibitions again until 1961. Then in 1972, 1977 and posthumously - in 1980

Petrov, Nikola

1881-1916

landscapes

born Vidin.

A defining figure in the country's painting tradition - despite his short life. Only 22 when he helped found the Modern Art Association in 1903 aiming to change the course of Bulgarian art.

Can be considered founder of urban landscape in the country



In 1908 began his studies in the second class of the National Academy of Arts, where he studied painting classes with Ivan Mrkvicka, Jaroslav Veshin and Ivan Angelov. After interruptions graduated in 1913 Nikola Petrov painted mostly landscapes - close to the style of the French Impressionists.

Part of his work is a genre paintings in which the artist combines modern technology with Bulgarian subjects. In 1912 participated in the murals in the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral with the composition "Introduction to the temple" in the northern altar.

Petrov, Petar	1908-70	Portrait realist	Born Kotel 1928 entered Sofia art school 1931 graduated (B Mitov and N Marinova) 1932 art teacher in a Sofia school 1950 assistant to Boris Mitov 1954 principal drawing teacher 1968 full Professor
Peycheva, Zhivka		Still life portraits	Born Plovdiv. She graduated from the Academy of Arts with Prof. Stefan Ivanov and She took part in a number of exhibitions of the Association of the Southern-Bulgarian artists and general exhibitions of the Union of Bulgarian Artists.
Pitter, Josef	1881-1925	Graphic artist	born Kostelec, Czechia 1897-1902 Studied Art in Prague 1909-31 State Industrial School of Arts as Tutor in graphics arts 1913-21 full Professor - active in applied graphics for various state and commercial bodies 1921 appointed Technical Director at Neubert and Sons printing plant in Prague 1925 died of flu..... http://www.nationalartgallerybg.org/index.php?l=59&id=416 http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=486
Popchev, Ivan	1941-1994	Landscape Nude Still life	Born Dobovo village, near Stara Zagora Grad Sofia art school 1967 Settled in SZ
Popivanov, Alexander	1879-1915	Landscape portraits	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=9496
Poplilov, Alexander	1916-2001	Fig, landscape and portrait Book design	Born Kula 1940 grad Sofia Art School Worked in various art and graphic schools in Soia Historical themes
Popov, Asen	1895-1976	landscape	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=245
Popov, George John	1906-1960	Figurative	In Paris 1930 - 1935 and 1937 -1939 which acquainted him with French art and the representatives of surrealism, futurism and cubism. 1947 - 1948 the artist lived and worked in Sweden where he created mainly illustrations. That period is also noted for his water-colours which stand out for their extraordinary intensity. He found the constraints of the new regime oppressive and,

			from the late 40s worked entirely in pastel and in cinema. He explored the topic of "Fishermen" in a cycle of preparatory sketches and pictures. At that time he was attracted by the still-life genre.
Popov, Jordan	1913-2001	landscape	Born Elena Graduated 1940 from Sofia Academy of Art under Prof Decho Ouzounov He loved and celebrated the countryside and hated the noise and bustle of cities....A lot of his paintings focus on fields and the earth.
Popova- Balarewa, Vaska	1902-1979	Figurative	born in the city of Ruse on April 7, 1902. She was raised in the family of a general and a mother who was an artist and a musician. Her love of art took her to the National Academy of Arts, Sofia, where she took up studies in Prof. Tseno Todorov's painting class. Under the mentorship of Prof. Nikola Marinov, she mastered the language of colours, graduating in 1927. Two years later she was admitted to the Academy of Arts in Rome for further specialization. There she got acquainted in detail with leather crafting techniques. After her return to Bulgaria, she established herself as a pioneer in this field. In 1933 she married General Hristo Balarev, with whom she had a son. The artist's home was frequented by intellectuals Soya Paprikova, Bistra Vinarova, Alexander Poplilov, Cyril Petrov, Raphael Mihaylov, Andrey Nikolov, Boris Ivanov, Alexander Zhendov, Mara Georgieva, Vaska Emanuilova, Veselin Staykov, Lyuba Palikareva. There is an interesting group of paintings standing out, representing the images of tenor Stefan Makedonski, composer Lyubomir Pipkov, artists Cyril Petrov and Raphael Mihaylov, author Elisaveta Bagryana, all of whom were friends with the artist. applied arts (leather crafting).
Poptoshev, Efgeni	1907-1974	figurative	born in Samokov. His father Todor Stoyanov Poptoshev graduated from engineering at the Sorbonne and then planned Samokov. He is also a painter, musician and writer, member of the Union of Bulgarian Writers. Author of the music of the song "white stone fountain." Surnames were adopted by his grandfather pop Tose, who in 1860 read worship of Bulgarian rather than Greek in Sofia. studied for four years (1925-1928) Legal Studies at Sofia University. Then he decided to move in at the Academy of Arts in Sofia , where he met his future wife Rada. Both are students in the class of Dimitar Gyudzhenov and when in 1935 graduates become teachers in Petrich and Dupnitsa . At the beginning of his work creates mostly naked female bodies located in a natural setting :. The most famous of them,

			"Nude" (1939), his wife Rada pose while pregnant with their daughter - the future artist Lyudmila Poptosheva. Other similar works are: "Summer" - depicting three naked women under trees (1942), "Carefree" (1942). It creates an intimate psychological portraits: "Self-Portrait" (1937), "Portrait of RP" (1935), "Portrait of the artist's father" (1947), "Portrait of Professor. Hr. Obreshkov" (1947), "Portrait of the artist's wife" (1947). Was one of the masters of the most difficult genre of the portrait - the child's face, "Child Artist" (1943) "My daughter" (1947) Together with his wife Rada Poptosheva recreate childhood activities and games., Evgeni Poptoshev is known as the most exquisite as portraitist and author of strong compositions on historical themes Involved in applied graphics - drawings for newspapers, book illustrations, posters, shaping the festive marches. From 1933 participates in almost all joint art exhibitions and group exhibitions at home and abroad, Bucharest, Budapest, Moscow, Delhi, etc., http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=252
Poptoshev, Todor	1879-1956	aquarelles	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=228
Poptosheva, Rada	1911-1972		
Rachev, Alex	1927-2007	historical	Born Pleven. Painting completed in VIII "Nikolay Pavlovich" / NAA / in Prof. Ilia Petrov and Sculpture (1964) in G.Kotsev. The Art of Alex Rachev moving in two parallel directions - historical and landscape painting. While his landscapes are light, modern and artistically managed, isdtoricheskite his paintings oscillate between baroque and romantic to impress with surprising compositional solutions and dynamic accents. He is an author whose works are yet to be rediscovered by art historians and critics. The world in his paintings is intriguing and unexpected result of intellectual harmony between reality and fantasy author. More famous works of Alex works Rachev: "Battle of Vladislav of Varna" (1965), "The Fight in the Batak Church" (1969), "assimilate the Rhodope Bulgarians" (1971), "Export flag" (1982) and others. http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=60
Radoykov, Dimitar	1879-1940	Genre, landscape, portrait	Born Samokov. Taught by Mchkrk From 1901 teacher at Kazanlak 1907 teacher Samokov

		military	from 1910 Ruse and co-founder, with Atanas Mihov and Alex Lazarov, of North Bulgarian Artists Part of group painting icons of Russe and Samokov
Radulov, Tsvetan	1932-2002	Landscapes, graphics	Born Pazardzhik 1957 graduated Sofia art school under Ilyia Beshkov Designer in sugar industry alliance Sofia In the early 60s did conservation work in Poland Teacher Pazardzhik 1959-63 Founder and manager of Dospevki gallery in the town 1963-92
Rashev, Sasho	1927-2012		

Rainov, Nikola

1889-1954
Secessionist

born in. [Kesarevo](#) , Veliko Tarnovo, into a family of prominent activist for national liberation [Ivan Raynov](#) . Brother of the painter [Stoyan Manolov](#) , professor of ceramics and father of the eminent sculptor [Bojan Raynov](#) and writer [Bogomil Raynov](#)

Graduated from Sofia seminary (1908). Studied philosophy [at the University of Sofia](#) ([1911](#)). Participates in [the First World War](#) as a war correspondent to 9th Plevna Division occupied area of the defense line of the Southern Front, known as Dojransko.

Graduated from [State Art-Industrial School](#) in Sofia (1919).
Writes poetry, fiction , cultural anthropological works on the history of art, folklore, [ethnography](#) ;

Editor of the magazines " [Zenica](#) "and" [Orpheus](#) "newspapers" Belltower ". His first book " [Bogomil Legends](#) "([1912](#)) was published by the pseudonym Anonim . In the period 1918-1919, cooperates with [Geo Milev](#) , writing several articles for his magazine "Balance". The same year issued several books: "Visions around ancient Bulgaria", "Book of Kings", "The eyes of Arabia", "Solar Tales", "Between the desert and the life", the poem "The City." Translated "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" .

In 1919 embarks on a great journey in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor.

During the period 1922-1927, he worked as chief librarian at [the National Library](#) in Plovdiv. Seconded for two years in Paris to meet with cultural monuments in the French capital. When he returned, accepted a teaching position at the Art Academy in Sofia, where he was professor of art history from 1927 to 1950.



Rainov Stoyan	1894-1978	Aquarelle	
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Rilski, Vladimir

1905-1969



Powerful, bold portraits, landscapes celebrating Bulgarian landscape and life

born in Peshtera in a family of the famous intellectual, George Rilski.

He entered the Art Academy in Sofia in 1925, where his teachers were Prof. Dimitar Gyudjenov, Prof. Nikola Marinov and Stefan Ivanov.

In 1929 he moved to Vienna for specialization.

After his return to Bulgaria, he worked as a high school art teacher in Plovdiv. Associate to the circle of "Baratsi" - the artists Vasil Barakov, Zlatyu Boyadjiev Tsanko Lavrenov whose motto is deeply in

the spirit of the national art.

His first solo exhibition was in Plovdiv city in 1938. He also organized a joint exhibition with Zlatyu Boyadjiev.

From 1945, taught at the Art Academy in Sofia. During this period he participated in many General Art Exhibitions.

In 1949 Rilski money pressures forced him to do fairly menial work in Smolyan - doing posters, wall paintings and painting the interiors of public buildings .

Indicative of the personality of Vladimir Rilski is the attitude of his contemporaries to him - because of his idealistic spirit and selflessness is called by Rhodopeans "Beztrebarnika" and 'Forest King'.

His painting brings the romantic iconography of the church and the realism of the Bulgarian folklore. While he was alive, the artist was considered as one of the most prominent representatives of the movement of native art in the 30s and 40s of XX century. Of the same, period (30s of XX century) is his emblematic cycle "Houses of Koprivshtitsa town".

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=220>

In the 1960s he moved to the Rhodope "Shiroka luka" village where in 1969 he died in a tragic accident



Rubev, Hristo (George)

1894-1975

landscapes

Trained in Prague after 1919

Glorious colourist

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=75>

600 euros

Russeva, Liliana

1932-2009

Figurative, landscapes

Born Sofia

Wonderful sadness in a lot of her work

<http://gallery-city.com/lilyana-ruseva/>**Russev, Svetlin**1933-
modernist

Grand Old Man and Doyen of Bulgarian art - and leading art critic.

Born in Pleven.

In 1959 he graduated in painting at the State Art Academy under Prof. Dechko Uzunov.

Since 1975 has been a professor at the Art Academy.

Chairman (1973-85) of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, Vice-President (1982-84) of the Committee for Culture, Director (1985-88) of the National Art Gallery
 Amassed a fantastic collection which he has donated to two public galleries, one in Pleven, the other in Sofia at what used to be his studio very near the Alexander

Nevsky Church.

The latter contains a huge library of art books which is freely available for consultations...

Sakazov, Milen	1903-1975	seascape	Born Varna?? http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=509 http://www.artprice.bg/art_targ_list.php?autor_id=485
Sandev, Patriki	1881-1959	Figurative, still-life, landscape	Born Kazanluk In classic tradition Absolutely brilliant works 1898 entered Sofia art school Good example of long-forgotten artist..... http://auction-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=266

Savova-Nenova Ekaterina	1901-1980	portrait, still-life	born Sofia. Graduated 1925 from Prof Marinov's class One of founders of group of women artists in 1928
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Shahanova-Shishkova, Olga

1895-1978

landscape, interiors, still life

Born in Plovdiv. Graduated from the Art Academy in Sofia in the class in painting under Professor Ivan Mrkvicka in 1920. Until 1925 assistant teacher in painting at the School in Sofia.

From 1930 s lived and painted in Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Germany where she had exhibitions. Wife of the famous industrialist and producer of wines Shishkov. in 1946 she (strangely) returned to Bulgaria.



Shahanova Olga was a member of the Association of South Bulgarian artists and the company of women artists and president. In the 60s Shahanova Olga went to Athens. For some time she lived and painted there. Most famous are the interiors. These people are recreated in a particularly intimate, ordinary atmosphere. Filled with vibrant color.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=159>

900 euros 44x49

Shivachev, Marko	1892-1946	Portraiture; aquarelles	born Kazanlak graduated 1922 plus teacher in Elena, Chipra, Kadzhali another lovely artist who has disappeared from sight!
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Shtarkelov, Konstantin

1889-1961

Landscape, aquarelle



Born Sofia.

He studied at the Art Academy in Sofia from 1906. In 1909 Moscow. His first solo exhibition held in 1911. He was war artist in 1912-1913 and 1917.

He was the most famous and outstanding Bulgarian watercolour painter who preferred to draw landscapes from Rila and Pirin Mountains, Sofia and Tarnovo regions. His works were presented at national and solo exhibitions in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Venice, Germany and Hungary.

After September 9, 1944 his work was denied and forgotten because of his ties with the Palace . They call it the "official artist of the bourgeois regime and royal favorite " ... Constantine Shtarkelov was deported ,

expelled from UBA and spent five months in the Central Prison.

His father George was a citizen of Sofia, a shoemaker by trade, and his mother, Mary (d. 1925) was born in Nis. The father of the artist died early - Constantine was only 13 years old. Began to assist his mother to feed the family - works shoemakers, selling newspapers, extra in Opera and the National Theatre in the evening ...

In 1906 Kontantin Shtarkelov joined the school of drawing and even the first semester participated in the competition among the students of all courses autumn landscape, winning second prize. Just a few months later received the first prize for the winter landscape. This is a surprise for professors and students and creates a well-deserved popularity of previously unknown young man. However, Konstantin Shtarkelov remains among the most modest, silent and diligent students of drawing school.

Because of the financial status of the family, he was forced at the end of the second year of drawing leave school. barely eighteen, he arrived in Russia and stay for a while in Odessa. No money, no acquaintances and recommendations, he found shelter in the first place in the famous Odessa monastery "Andreevskoe clergy" - a refuge for many Bulgarian migrant workers, students and craftsmen fallen. The monastery provided the residents have only shelter, tea and bread.

"I was pleased when I had a piece of bread and a cup of hot tea. "Only a few months Constantine finds its environment - also wandering and homeless, but filled with bright hopes and foremost with unquenchable love for art.

Little is known about either the days of the young artist. Lalyu Metev gives us valuable fragments of the time, writing: *"Worried by the obligation to return to the dormitory of the monastery at the specified time, Shtarkelov rather rent a bed in a crowded room in the city where he lives during their stay in Odessa Here lies before him passes a gallery of images and judgments - acquaintances with vagrants pursued by misfortune and unhappiness people, idealists or spiritually corrupt, scammers unrecognized poets, artists, young and enthusiastic theatergoers, clean and noble souls and schemers petty crooks. The huge world of pre-revolutionary Russia in their daily lives, with southern temperament, with all of its sounds, colors and contrasts that undoubtedly left irresistible impression on the young artist.*

Found a permanent buyer Georgian-known bookseller, whom he undertakes to sell everything he draws.

Again, we can refer to the writings of Lalyu Metev: *"In the second year the young Bulgarians went to Moscow, and again shares room with workers. Old Russian capital, its rich spiritual life, exhibitions, workshops of the famous Moscow School of Painting made extraordinary and lasting impression on the stunned Bulgarian. For a fascinating insight helped his close friendship with a young Russian writer, late offshoot of dying populism and incorrigible idealist - David Maksimchuk. Thanks to him Shtarkelov could not only penetrate the cultural and spiritual life of Moscow to meet with the various events of the then artistic world, but go touch the charm of the Russian soul. The strongest experience Shtarkelov in Moscow was meeting in the*

Tretyakov Gallery with great masters of Russian painting - Ventseslavov, Shishkin, Pollen, Savrasov and foremost Levitan and Kuindzhi. Days he roamed the quiet halls of the Tretyakov Gallery, pausing in front of paintings by Repin, Serov, Vrubel and Vasnetsov from ... "



At the end of 1909 Shtarkelov Constantine returned to Bulgaria with enough experience to work alone but hesitates. He wants to have an artist diploma and thereby assume more secure future because such a document entitling him to be a candidate as a teacher.

In 1910, due to material difficulties the student decides to submit to the gallery Trapkov four unsigned

watercolors, which were immediately purchased.

But the young artist understands that he needs contact with nature, the living beauty of Bulgaria, summer meadow, rain and storms, including born scent and fresh beauty of all nature. Therefore, in the summer he goes to Pavlikem, Sevlievo, Gabrovo, Tarnovo, and paint all the way. This is where Constantine Shtarkelov met for the first time with those adorable spots foothills of Bulgarian nature - the blossoming summer lawns briers scrubs with sunspots shadows near the deserted road, which will remain favorite stories of all his future work. Searches are aligned with a spiritual urge of the artists we find the face of Bulgarian, attract the world's attention on the natural beauty of our Revival architectural tradition and nature.

This tour became the occasion for the next 1911 Shtarkelov to organize his first solo exhibition - nearly 80 works, many of which were purchased at the outset of the exhibition.

This success makes name Shtarkelov popular among the general public. He suddenly found himself the owner of an incredible amount of money for it, Shtarkelov leaves a significant portion of her mother, and the rest goes to the West to visit major galleries in Vienna, Munich, Paris, London, Lausanne, Geneva and Venice.

After 75 days Shtarkelov Constantine returned to Bulgaria with rich impressions of the centuries-old treasures of European art with new 35 painted during the trip with pictures and more greater hope to recreate and inspires in his works Bulgarian nature.

During the Balkan War (1912-1913) and the subsequent Second Balkan War (June to July 1913) Shtarkelov a martial artist and leaves a number of drawings, sketches and drawings of the life of the soldiers.

Above is [a 1912 study from](#) the campaign

In 1917, once again war artist during the First World War lasted from July 28, 1914 to November 11, 1918, leaving more than 300 sketches and drawings.

In 1915 he graduated in painting at the State Art-Industrial School in Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka. Ranks in the list of legitimate and regular members of the Union of Bulgarian scientists, writers and artists. In 1919, he was among the founders of the "Native Art" and participated in all its exhibitions. Upon completion of the First World War artist devoted almost entirely to watercolor landscapes.

He remains, however, the incomparable singer of the mighty mountain ranges - Rila and Pirin, raw beauty and pristine nature. Variety of rich colors and landscapes are his from the Rhodopes, painted in the thirties. These are not the Rhodope Mountains Barakov or Zdravko Alexandrov of Detchev or Tcanko Lavrenov - the world of human emotions, daily care and joy. Rhodope's paintings are Shtarkelov song about nature, the timeless beauty of nature that is born and lives by the light of the sun. fascinating beauty of native nature artist presents in their field and mountain flowers - sometimes a single squill, wild hollyhock or geranium leaf, filled not only with virtuoso mastery of drawing but with sincere emotion and love: *"When I paint - either landscape or flower, I hear music or if you read poems of Lermontov or Nadson. And when I hear a great orchestra or choir I see landscape ... These landscapes, as are the days of my sad songs, these little cosmic, of which the soul is spiral Sharing is its mood. There her real life"* - confesses the artist Konstantin Shtarkelov.

He exhibited in solo exhibitions in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Venice, Germany, Hungary, he participated in collective performances of Bulgarian artists.

After September 9, 1944 Konstantin Shtarkelov is deported, expelled from UBA and spent five months in the Central Prison. His property was confiscated, and his apartment was destroyed in the bombing - there were destroyed

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=118>

http://artprice.bg/autor_details.php?act=data&elem_id=451

Shtilyanovo Tsvetana	1903-94	Still life and portraits (intellectuals	Born Kazanlak - 1917-22 Sofia art school under Todorov 1925-28 under Guvdzhinov
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		and friends)	studied Paris, Prague and Vienna 1929-33
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Skitnik, Sirak



1883-1943
modernist

Born Sliven with the name Panaiot Todorov Hristov into a poor family of a textile worker and absorbed his father's curiosity and eloquence. One day - his memoirs recount - "my father, who often remained unemployed gave me 40 lev with the words: "Son, no longer can. See where and how you earn your bread." In 1898 he entered a seminary in Sofia and in four years built a relationship with Sofia literary bohemians.

"One summer day in the Troyan Monastery I sat under the old oak tree to rest. I dug the sand in front of him with the stick he was holding. It was sad and felt the loneliness and frustration of my youth. Who knows why I wrote to myself the word "Sirak" and spontaneously added to it "Wanderer." Hence the name by which he became known - which means

"Orphan Wanderer".

In 1903, he graduated from the seminary and began a teacher - first in Nikopol, then in his native Sliven. 1908 turns life Panaiot Todorov.

With the money saved he went to Petersburg to pursue painting and remained there until 1912 This his stay in the Russian capital is particularly important to his worldview and its overall shape as an artist. Spiritual connection with his teacher Alexander Nikolaev Benoit / architect, art historian artist, critic, illustrator, designer / his erudition and talent are ideal and model Panaiot Todorov.

Because of his insatiable hunger for knowledge he was given the nickname "Devourer of space." Exhibits paintings along with artists - avant-garde, among them Chagall and Max. To support himself, painted theatrical scenery and posters. Published poems in the famous magazine "Apollo" where print their works Chekhov, Gorky and Block. His paintings from this period are filled with ghostly visions of "white nights". In 1912 the young artist participating in the exhibition of "Union of youth" in St. Petersburg. The paintings in the exhibition received an encouraging letter from Alexander Benoit and Nicholas Roerich.

Home in Bulgaria. He participated in three wars - the Balkan, and Muzhdusayuznicheskata World. He returned from the war with the Order of Honor and several shrapnel in the chest, resulting in the end of his life suffers from shortness of breath.

In the years after the war Skitnik began his journalistic activity, seeking to bring in Bulgaria that innovative spirit with which he met and who learned in touch with the giants of the art of the 20th century in St. Petersburg. So he headed the spiritual elite in Sofia. In 1919 together with Nikolay Raynov and Ivan Milev create movement "Native Art" to our affinity fine art with the expressive beauty of the old Bulgarian icon, miniature paintings, fabrics and ornaments, myths and legends. So merge Bulgarian and European, national and universal, traditional and modern, folk and individual.

Because of his public activity and built its reputation artist and critic Sirak is selected from the guild for the first president of the General Society of Artists, which later gave birth to the Union of Bulgarian Artists. In 1923-1924, he was a playwright and artistic secretary of the National Theatre and the play of Maurice Maeterlinck "Monni Vanna." In 1935 he was appointed head of broadcasting in Bulgaria and chief curator of the Bulgarian radio. He sees its mission in building the radio as the cultural institute of Bulgaria.

He also designed sets for the National Theatre (Naroden Teatâr) in Sofia. He painted mainly landscape and still-lives in oils (e.g. Interior with Flowers, 1920), tempera (e.g. Russian Monastery , 1912), gouache (e.g. the Kiss of Judas , 1920;) and watercolour; he also drew in coloured pencil.

During the 1920s and 1930s he became known in Bulgaria as an innovator who experimented with new mixes of colour and form. Both his poetry and his original and highly emotional painting show his allegiance to the Symbolist movement. From 1920 to 1940 he was editor and publisher of the intellectual magazine Zlatorog (Golden Horn). He also belonged to the National Art Society of Bulgaria and was one of the founders (1932) of the Union of the Societies of Artists of Bulgaria

Sotirov, Stoyan	1903-1984	portrait, landscape	born in Gradevo village, Blagoevgrad region. Graduated in painting under Prof. D. Gudzhenov and Prof. St. Ivanov from the Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia in 1928
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Spasov, Angel

1884-1974

Sculptor and painter

Born Pleven - studied under Prof Markvitchka at Sofia art school...

Best known as a sculptor - one of many greats produced by Bulgaria, his paintings from the 1930s are also very powerful...

A great catalogue on his work was recently issued by Pleven Gallery

http://www.plevengallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/katalog_aspasov.pdf



Staikov, Atanas	1905-1988	interiors, landscapes	born Smolyian first solo exhibition there at age 20 graduated 1929 from National Art Academy 1928-31 Paris 1932-48 painting teacher in various Plovdiv schools celebration of traditional Rhodopes living - frequent use of tempera. Bright colours http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=14755
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Staikov, Vesselin

1906-1970

Graphics



born Peshtera, a small town nestled in the picturesque northern slopes of the Rhodope Mountains. On his mother's side he is descended from a prominent family of fighters for church and political independence. These militant traditions tended to develop certain tendencies in the artist's work. He worked on a whole cycle of engravings based on the national liberation struggle of the Bulgarian people from the epoch of National Renaissance down to our times.

Vesselin Staikov spent his childhood at the house of his grandfather, one of the enlightened and educated men of his times. Here, at an early age, he had an opportunity of browsing in the old family library, acquainting himself with books and

illustrations not easily accessible in that epoch. These opened up a new world to him. He would sit for hours studying the pictures of the world-famous masters of Renaissance and of eminent Russian Painters.

The illustrations of the Russian Niva magazine and Gustave Dore's fine engravings in the Bulgarian translation of Dante's *Inferno* had a particularly strong and lasting impact on the impressionable child. The second major influence in the youth's life was the Bulgarian painter and pedagogue Vitko Babakov, who used to spend summer vacations in Peshtera. Young Staikov would go out together with him and paint the attractive environs of the town and the scenic beauties of the Rhodope Mountains. During these excursions the two would engage in long discussions on the problems of art.

In 1925 Vesselin Staikov left for Sofia. As soon as he saw Staikov's exceptional gifts, the eminent Bulgarian Painter, Professor Stefan Ivanov, permitted the youth to join his last-year class before he was even admitted to the Academy of Art. Once he took one of Staikov's etudes and showed it to his class, citing it as an example of rare talent in a schoolboy.

In 1926 Staikov enrolled at the Academy of Art in Prof. Nikola Marinov's class as a non-matriculant, for he had not yet completed his secondary education. Later he took all the necessary examinations, became a regular student and in 1932 graduated from the academy, where he had attended Prof. Tseno Todorov's course in painting.

In the summer of 1932 Vesselin Staikov left for Arbanassi, a Bulgarian village famous for its original old architecture.. 1933 Staikov joined the State Printing House in Sofia as engraver. Here he lived amid engravers and technicians and acquainted himself with printing technique. Staikov remained about a year at the State Printing House. He increasingly establishing himself as a creative artist with a social consciousness, as a bold master of composition, as a portrayer of Bulgarian architecture and of Bulgarian land.

Parallel with his successful participation in the Bulgarian National Art Exhibitions, Vesselin Staikov achieved considerable renown abroad. At the 1937 World Fair in Paris Staikov scored his greatest success, winning a gold medal. In 1938 the artist left for Munich, where he organized an individual exhibition, The same year he participated in a Bulgarian exhibition shown in New York. In 1940, after a competitive examination, Staikov went to Italy for further specialization. In Florence he studied painting with Prof. Felice Carena, and in the course of his tour of Italy he painted landscapes with architectural subjects from Florence and Venice.

In 1945, Staikov was appointed assistant professor in graphic arts at the Sofia Academy of Art. He also turned his attention to postage stamps.

In 1951 Staikov left his chair at the Academy of Art to devote himself completely to creative work. In addition to

engravings with themes from nature, old towns and mountain villages, Staikov produced a cycle of engravings on the modern city: Sofia with its modern architecture, the clearing of rubble after the air-raids and the construction of new houses and buildings. He shows a particular liking for the architectural landscape with its contrasting plasticity.

The artist was also fond of doing ancient, strangely shaped trees.

<http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/veselin-stajkov-veselin-staikov/paintings>

Stamatov, Stanio

1886-1963

Figurative and landscapes

Another favourite of mine...

born Shipka then teacher in Sofia and Kazanlak.

Graduated in painting under Prof. Ivan Mrkviska in 1911,

Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia.

He specialized in painting in Germany 1925 -1927 and in France in 1926.

Participated in the Balkan and First World War as a war artist.

Stamatov organized over 40 exhibitions in Bulgaria. Most active period 1930-38.

Has left many domestic scenes from his familiar rural life, large-format chamber and scenic landscapes from different corner of Bulgaria.

Died in Munich

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=169>

1,400 euros 44x64



Stamenov, Alexander	1905-1971	All genres	Born Koukoush, Macedonia 1921-26 Art School under N Marinov http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=206
Stanchev, Christo	1870-1950	All genres	Born Svezhen, Karlovo 1891-93 Studied at Florence Art Academy Also Munich 1894-5 1896 Settled in Plovdiv http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=130
Stanchev Kiril	1906-1988	landscapes	Born Russe Studied in Bucharest but was expelled for "propaganda" (??) Enrolled 1931 at Sofia art school under Todorov, Marinov and Ivanov and graduated in 1936 Returned to Ruse in 40s; scenic designer for the theatre there Founded the art gallery http://www.kirilart.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=59&lang=en
Stanchev, N	1900-1964	Landscape, figurative	Son of Christo

Stefanov-Chilito Vasil	1887-1918	portraits	In Russe gallery ("lady with hat") Russe - society of north BG artists
Stefchev, Boris 1894-1983 Seascapes  Graduated in painting in 1916, Art-Industrial School in class of Prof. Tseno Todorov, and then a student of decorative art with Professor Stephan Badgov. In 1918 Ministry of Education granted scholarship for his studies in Munich. But due to the outbreak of the First World War, he specialized in the Royal Academy of Art in Vienna 1918-22. In the first year he is under Professor Pohvalski and the next two continued their studies in class of Prof. Jungvirt. His first solo exhibition is in Sofia in 1921. Stefchev began working as a teacher of drawing in Sofia. His early compositions are defined as part of the symbolism of Bulgarian art in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Since 1927 he devotes most of his work of the sea view. Suggestion of mysticism create specific character of most of the landscapes of Boris Stefchev. Another of my personal favourites. More at http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=142 500 euros			
Stoilov, Vasil	1904-1990	all genres of art of painting - portraits, daily scenes, landscapes	Born 1904 in the village of Podene (at present a Sofia quarter) in a large family. In 1922 he began his studies at the Academy of Arts, in the art of painting class of Prof. Tzeno Todorov. From 1929 to 1932 he studied and worked in Paris earning his living by selling his pictures. From 1958 he was professor of drawing. At Faculty of Arch He produced a gallery of deep emotional images of rural villagers and the technique of water colours and themes of daily life. http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/vasil-stoilov-vasil-stoilov/paintings
Stolarova, Maria 1925 - Industrial landscapes, still-lives Born Varna and studies under Dencho Uzenov, she was one of Bulgaria's first women industrial landscape artists -			

although in her later life she has focused on flower studies....

Her industrial work has great power.



Svetkova, Kostadinka	1929-2006	Still lives	Classy Matisse-like colouring

Tabakov, Ivan



1901-1977

Versatile

Born Sofia. In 1925 he graduated in painting under professor Nicola Ganushev at the Art Academy - Sofia.

1926-32 he was at the Art Academy Paris with professor A. Bernard and prof. M. Bashe. Participated with portraits in the Salon of French artists and "Independent Artists". Worked on portrait, landscape and figure compositions.

The first two decades of his work creates an intimate, mostly psychological portraits and a series of images of eminent figures of culture. He painted a series of landscapes of Ohrid, Kavala and others.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=207>

Another favourite - and another underrated
80x70 3,400 euros

Tachev Haralambi		Like Milev - nouveaux arts	
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Tanev Nikola

1890-1962

Landscape

One of Bulgaria's greats! Fantastic colourist...

Born Svishtov, the family moved to Sofia in 1896. At age 13 sent to Paris with brother to study print techniques but began to reveal his artistic talents.

Studied under Paul Renoir and, in 1910, under Claude Monet.

Returned to Bulgaria in 1912 - with first one-man show in

Sofia. From autumn to May 1912 back in Paris for painting. The catalogue to his 2nd exhibition in Sofia in 1913 was



written by the famous caricaturist Alexander Bozhinov
 War artist from 1916-18. 1919 exhibition in Sofia had 168 works and another catalogue by Bozhinov. He was a prolific painter - sometimes averaging 4 a day!
 1920-22 Lived and painted in Austria and Germany.
 1927 started to paint in Karlovo village - site of his most famous paintings.
 Travelled extensively in Europe 1928-39.

Was imprisoned for several months after the Communist takeover - for little reason.
 1949 suffered a stroke which left him paralysed
[ARTPRICEbg has a good archive](#) of Tanev work

Tassev, Atanas	1897-1991	Landscape, genre	http://bnr.bg/fr/post/100739053/atanas-tassev-ou-le-talent-bulgare-dun-artiste-cosmopolite http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=273
Tasseva, Kalina	1927-	Figurative landscape	Graduated 1952 from Sofia under Uzunov and Ilyia Petrov
Titirinov, Strahil	1905-?	Aquarelles Mainly landscapes	Grad Sofia under Boris Mitov Superb Colourist http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=80
Todorov, Pavel	1894-	Landscapes, peasant scenes	1916-21 Art School - graduated under Markvitchka Delicate realist http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=319

Todorov, Tseno



1877-1953
 Landscape, portrait
 1896-1901 State Drawing School
 1901-07 Paris

 One of the greats...

Todorov, Vasil	1893-1977	Landscape portrait	Born Kazanlak 1919 graduated Sofia (under Stefan Ivanov) 1924 art teacher Kaz 1925-27 Assenovograd
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			1928 Stara Zagora Another delightful colourist
Tomov, Angel	1912-1993 (2001?)		Born Dobrich Spent time in Plovdiv http://artprice.bg/art_targ_details.php?elem_id=1346
Tomov, Evtim	1919-1997	Aquarelle, graphics	Born in the village Treklyano , Kyustendil . He studied graphics under Prof. V. Zachariev and painting under Prof. Nikola Marinov. In 1943 graduated from the Painting Academy under. Prof. Boris Mitov . Specialized (1943-1944) graphics in Vienna. After September 9, 1944 is actively involved as an artist - art editor in the publishing activities of the State Military Publishing. From 1957 he was professor at the VIII "N. Pavlovich ", Sofia. Doctor of Art (1976).
Tomov, Veselin	1909-1993	Fig, urban landscape	grew up in the town of Byala Slatina. studied specialty-painting under Professor Nicolas Ganushev Academy in Sofia. He graduated in 1934 with honours. Germany granted him a scholarship in the late 1930s and he went to Munich. At that time there were many Bulgarian students and graduates - artists, musicians, architects and lawyers. A Bulgarian trader of fruits, buys the still lifes he had brought from Bulgaria. The merchant continually gives Bulgarian fruit - especially grapes and so he began to paint still lifes. independent artist 41-43 Art Academy Munich At this time closer to German artist Willibald Demmel, with whom he often travels and paints landscapes. His sponsor Prof. Constantine Gerhardinger was dismissed from the Academy and deprived of his studio for opposing Hitler. Vesselin Tomov has already completed four semesters and decided to go back to Bulgaria because of the severe bombing. All his paintings were left in Germany because of the prohibition to export artwork and lost forever. After returning from Germany, Vesselin Tomov spent a year in Sofia in October 1944. moved with his parents in the town of Byala Slatina. There he remained until the end of the year. He painted portraits of friends and children. Illustrated poems of the poet George Veselinov. During 1945. he briefly worked in the Ministry of Information as Head of Fine Arts propaganda through a period in which he often had to show ingenuity and courage to protect national values. An example is the position when a committee of Soviet military wants to requisition paintings from the National Art

			Gallery. With much tact and perseverance Vesselin Tomov managed to deflect them and lead them to the studios of prominent artists, where they buy paintings. So it except that keeps our national wealth helps his colleagues in the difficult post-war years. First solo exhibition February.1947 For years Vesselin Tomov works in the field of stamp design, decorative and monumental art. His mosaics and graffito are in Slatina, Dupnitsa, Bulgaria, Kozloduy NPP http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/veselin-tomov-veselin-tomov/paintings
Toplinski, Dimitar	1893-1963	landscape	http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=11193
Tsankov, Max	1877-1965		born Razgrad

Trichkov, Ivan



1892-1959
Landscape

Born Vratsa. Graduated painting under prof. Petko Klisurov from Art-Industrial School in Sofia.

His work is characterized by diversity of colours, play of shadows and penumbras, inspiration, precise lines. Unchanging decor are old farmhouses, shepherds' huts and mountain cabins presented with a rare realism.

Favourite artists of King Boris III who had many of his paintings - and also one of my favourites!! [ARTPRICEbg has more](http://www.artpricebg.com) also [http://www.gallery-](http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=153)

[victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=153](http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=153)

Tringov, Constantin

1907-1981

Landscape mainly - also still-life and portrait

born Kazanlak to a peasant family

Densely worked paintings

His talent first came to Stanio Stamatov's attention notice at school and was nurtured by another art master - Chorbadzhtiyski-Chudomir

Forced by his father to enrol at Sofia University to study law he enrolled at the same time in Sofia Art School

Interrupted studies after his father's death in 1929

1937 graduated and seems thereafter to have been independent...

He loved the seasons - in particular winter...



Tsoncheva, Mara	1906-1989	portraits, still lifes, landscapes and compositions.	born and raised in Burgas, she studied painting at the Art Academy with Nikola Marinov . Taught for many years at the academy and became Professor Art History. Wrote about Renaissance art. modernist socialist realist During her lifetime she made a large donation to the National Gallery, where most of her paintings can be found. Her other works are in SAG , galleries Burgas and Sliven, in private collections throughout the country.
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Tsonev, Kiril



1896-1961

born Kyustendil.

1915 started to study at Sofia art school but then enrolled in army

1918/19 continued studies under Todorov

Studied Vienna Art Academy 1920/21 - then Munich Art Academy 1921-25 and stayed there until 1929. Then a year in Berlin.

One of the innovators of his time,
Influenced by German New Objectivity. Travelled 1930-32 in south america (Mexico and Cuba) and returned to Bulgaria in 1933 after the nazis came to power in Germany.

1942-50 he was Professor at Sofia Art Academy - and an art critic and historian.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mihalorel/sets/72157600058418332/detail/>

Urumov, Georgi	1891-1957	Landscapes Genre Still life	1913-1919 studied at Art Academy under Muchvrksa 1927 graduated under T Todorov
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Ustagenov, Marin

1872-1937

Spectacular all-rounder

born in Russe; studies art in Sofia and specialised in restoration skills in Munich. - then becoming one of the first Bulgarian restorers and conservators

Founder of Lada school.

Was a war artist 1912-18 and struggled to exist - with various unsuccessful business ventures

He participated in the restoration of Boyana Church and Monastery Zemen Because dealing with the business until his death in 1937, after the September 9 putch, was declared an enemy of the people, his heirs -. harassment, and pictures Ustagenov - kicked out of the curriculum at the Academy of Arts

an under-rated painter in my view

Uzenov, Dechko	1899-1986	portrait	born Kazanluk. Bulgaria's Picasso 1922/23 Munich. Teacher Art Academy Sofia 1924-1932; 1937 Professor and from 1945 its rector. The Dechko Uzunov gallery possesses 13,000 oil paintings, water colors, drawings, designs and sketches by Uzunov. The works were donated to the Sofia municipality by his heirs: artists Hristo Neikov, Atanas Neikov, Elena Vulchanova and Penyo Vulchanov. The gallery is housed in Uzunov's workshop on Dragan Tsankov Boulevard, a two-story building in the compound of the artist's house.
Valchanov, Ivan	1889-1953	Landscape	Born Kazanlak Grad 1914 under Mchrv, Angelov and Stefan Ivanov Teacher Lom, Harmanli War artist Friend of Bozhinov, Dmitrov, Sht Teacher Kazanlak. Karlovo and VT 1935 settled in Sofia One of so many underestimated....
Valkanov, Dimitar	1907-1997	battle canvases, portraits, figural compositions and landscapes	born on May 13, 1907 in the village Aprilovo District. Graduated (1934) Painting at the Academy of Arts in Sofia, with Prof. Nikola Marinov / from whom he inherited the picturesque feeling / and master Dimitar Gyudzhenov historical paintings, which ignited his interest in recreating history. longtime head of the military artists studio, a veteran of World War II. draws a number of paintings on this subject: "Destroyed Budapest" (1949), "August 1941 - native shore" (1961). famous paintings: 'Spring near Sofia "(1958)," Reflection "(1959)," Waiting "(1959 His father is the artist and author of tales Veselin Valkanov.
Valkov, Pavel	1908-1956	Graphic artist	Born Burgas one of the founders of modern Bulgarian graphics. Art Academy in Sofia with painting in the class of prof. Nikola Marinov and graphic prof. Vassil Zahariev. Made a number of solo exhibitions in his native Burgas, Plovdiv, Sofia, Kazanlak, Silistra, Ruse. His works are represented in many exhibitions abroad as Beijing, Delhi, Venice, Budapest, Prague, Moscow, New York, Paris and others. His last years living in Sofia and taught at the Art Academy. His work relates primarily to Burgas and Southern Coast. Painted old quays of the port of Bourgas, old intaglios near

			Bourgas customs and fishermen. Author of several picturesque portraits of famous citizens and hundreds of Bulgarian stamps.. remains as Master of aquatint, one of the most difficult graphic techniques. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=13264
Vasiliev, Asen	1900-1981	portraits, landscapes and still lifes	Born Kyustendil. In 1925 he graduated at the Art Academy in Dimitar Gyudzhenov Nicolas Ganushev, Stefan Ivanov and Nikola Marinov. He worked as a high school teacher in Berkovitsa (1926-1927), Shumen (1927 to 1930) and Sofia (1930-1940). Artist in Sofia (1940-1950), a referent of museums and art galleries in KNIK, Deputy Director (1957-1959) at the Art Institute of BAS, He participated in the establishment of the Union of artists in Bulgaria. Interested as a historian of Bulgarian art during the Renaissance. Participate actively in the construction of the museum network in the country in the reconstruction of the Archaeological Museum, museums in Ruse, Shumen, Panagyurishte and others. in 1942 he traveled through Macedonia, exploring the monuments of Bulgarian Renaissance art, which are published in several articles in the magazine. "Macedonia", "Macedonian thought" and others. three times travels around Mount Athos and conduct research - mainly in art Zograph Monastery. in his research deals with murals in the rock monasteries in with. Ivanovo, Thracian tomb of Kazanlak, the old Renaissance churches in Sofia. Painted the famous "Discussing a painting" (1952) He participated in a number of complex and scientific expeditions BAS : Dobrogea (1954), Northwestern Bulgaria (1956), the Middle Rhodopes (1958) and more. collaborated in magazines for art and archeology. Author of many articles, monographs and books.
Vasilev, Stoian	1904-1977	landscape	Born Pazardzhik. In 1927 he graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, arts of painting with Prof. Tzeno Todorov. In the years from 1928 to 1935 lives, works and works as a teacher in junior high and high school male "Ivan Aksakov" in Pazardzhik. Initiated the establishment of the Culture and Education Society "Native art." Works as a curator at the Archaeological Museum "Ivan Voyvodov" at the Community Center "Light". Between 1935 and 1946 he lives, works and works as a teacher in Male High School in Veliko Tarnovo "Sv. Cyril".

			1937 specialization in Germany to learn about innovations in teaching the subject "drawing" in schools. He retired as a teacher in 1954. Member of the Society for Contemporary Art and UBA. Makes 32 exhibitions - 32 in Bulgaria and three abroad: Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt. He preferred themes from the Veliko Tarnovo region. A really prolific creator. He worked in various formats. Professor of arts of painting at St. St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo for many years. Vasilev bequeathed all his artistic creativity over 2,500 valuable books, monographs and over 1,200 manuscripts and archival materials. Currently Art Gallery "Stanislav Dospevski" owns the largest collection of the artist - 2754 paintings: oil, pastel and watercolor, 140 albums with drawings. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=51
Velkov, Simeon	1885-1963	Landscape, portraits	Born in Panagurishte. - Graduated (1910) Painting in the Industrial School of Arts , Sofia, (now NAA) with Prof. Ivan Mrkvicka . Visited many museums in Italy and Germany. High school teacher in Plovdiv and Asenovgrad (until 1923), professor (1926-1947) at the Art Academy , Sofia. During the Balkan war in the press cooperate with drawings and creates a number of battle works. Illustrates historical works and textbooks. Most of his works are in the Museum of Military History in Sofia, Sofia City Art Gallery , the galleries in Plovdiv, Gabrovo, Strajitsa and elsewhere. was awarded the title of Honored Artist. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=326
Velchev, Georgi 1891-1955 one of the great masters of the seascape . born on November 18, 1891 in Varna. From 1910 to 1920 (with two interruptions due to World War I) are painting at the State Art - Industrial School in Sofia at Ivan Mrkvicka and Stefan Ivanov. Even in his earliest works from 1917 - 1920 r. tends towards modern and liberated picturesque imagery that gravitates to the Impressionist , symbolist. Part of the generation of artists such as Nicolai Raynov Ivan Milev , Vassil Zahariev and some others who in the late 1910s and			

early 1920s trying to resist traditional realism

From 1920 to 1922 Velchev lives in Paris. Magnificent Oil and gouache works created then showed his affection for the style of Pierre Bonnard

...contemplation of romantic and sometimes mystical view of nature and man

In 1923, he resides in Germany - Munich , Berlin, Bremen.

There are well received exhibitions in Karlsruhe and Wiesbaden roam and paint in the mountains of Tyrol, visiting Italy . He was invited by the famous symbolist and expressionist Heinrich Fogeler in the famous artistic colony in Worpswede near Bremen. In this period Georgi Velchev is a European artist who gives meaning and eagerly accepts the impulses of the new art in its very center .

In 1924 he was already in New York, where he resided until 1931 and made eight exhibitions. Traveled to Miami , San Francisco, Philadelphia, visited Canada and Hawaii . The economic crisis in the U.S. forcing him to return to Bulgaria , where he remained until the end of his life. He visited Australia and China.

In Bulgaria, the artist lives and works in his native house in Varna. He continues his tireless journey - in villages and towns in mountainous and coastal areas - and contemplate the life of the small Bulgarian world. Creates in his paintings poetry sunny courtyards of old tilted Vratnica , bridges and fountains, rural and urban houses and streets. In this type of picture it is comparable to artists such as Nikola Taney and Daniel Detchev .

But most attracted to the sea as a pictorial motif . Prefers to interpret filled with rich symbolism meeting between the sea and the lonely cliff . In these landscapes especially haunting tension, a dramatic feeling , and sometimes symbolic spirit. Comparable only with paintings of Alexander Mutafov .

Georgi Velchev was a proud, freedom-loving person , adamant and forthright in expressing his views . He was one of many artists who, after 1944, was rejected by the authorities and died poor and destitute . His most famous self-portrait from 1948 shows a mature and dignified artist whose gaze shows scepticism and disappointment.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=191>

Venev, Stoian



1904-1989

all genres

born Skriniano village, Kyestendil where he spent his school years.

Met Vladimir Dmitrov there and was strongly influenced by him. Graduated from Sofia art school in 1931.

Created images of everyday life and Bulgarian villages - with a strong satirical tone. Apparently influenced by G Grosz

Vesin, Jaroslav

1860-1915

a [Czech](#) painter who worked in [Bulgaria](#) and who was noted as a master of [genre painting](#). The realistic depiction of battle scenes from the [First Balkan War](#) (1912) are the subject of a substantial part of his work.

Věšín studied at the [Academy of Fine Arts in Prague](#), but moved to the [Academy of Fine Arts Munich](#) in 1881 and graduated in 1883. Afterwards he worked in [Munich](#) and in [Slovakia](#), with his paintings of the period mainly related to [Slovak](#) village life.

Věšín arrived in Bulgaria in 1897 and remained there for the remainder of his life. Until 1904, he was a professor at the [National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia](#) and mainly worked in the area of genre painting, with notable paintings such as Threshing near [Radomir](#) (1897), Ploughman (or Land, 1899), Horse market in Sofia (1899), Smugglers (1899), In front of a market (1899), Threshing (1900), etc. The main topic of his interest was the life and labour of the Bulgarian villager.

After 1904, Věšín became the head painter with the [Ministry of War](#) and, although he did not abandon his old interests (with works such as Coalers (1910), Lumberjacks (1910), On the game's track (1910), Hunter with hounds (1911), etc.), he became famous with his masterpieces of battle painting: Manoeuvres (series began in 1899 and lasted until the [Balkan Wars](#), The [Samara flag](#) (1911), Onslaught (or Bayonet charge, 1913), The Turkish retreat at [Lüleburgaz](#) (1913), Lüleburgaz-[Çatalca](#) (1913) and a series of sketches and complete works on the [siege of Edirne](#), among which Bibouac in front of Edirne (1913), Resting after 13 March 1913 (1913), etc.

Many of his works are displayed in the [National Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Sofia. Among Věšín's students were [Nikola Petrov](#), [Atanas Mihov](#) and other major Bulgarian painters.



The father of the artist, Frantisek Vesin, a physician by profession, is an active participant in the struggle for liberation of their homeland. Activity gets death sentence, but shortly before the execution and pardoned. To be saved from further persecution, settled in picturesque Czech town of Vranje. Here, on May 26, 1860 was born painter Jaroslav Veshin future. His mother, / home German woman / out of respect for her husband, she does not speak German to him, but formed in their children homage to the music of Beethoven, Haydn and Schubert. She fell in love creativity of the Czech Smetana.

Although two floors, their home was modest. As a child, Jaroslav filled his notebooks with drawings. This passion led his father to sacrifices in order to allow the son to enroll at the Prague Academy of Arts. After completing 1876-1880 / Veshin soldier entered the service in Slovakia and its specific costumes and customs leave a lasting impression on him. To improve his skills, he continued his studies in Munich. There began his real career in art. He lives Theresienstr and his studio is Landvershtrase where he visited many friends and admirers. Established a very close friendship with the writer Slovak Svetozar Urban Vayanski. Very soon in the artist begins to exist the idea that the Slavic peoples could obtain its natural place among other European nations only through general assistance and cultural activity.

Jaroslav Veshin was rated almost immediately, even with his first mature compositions. Acquires prestige and international renown. Among his closest admirers and patrons is Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria. He is a passionate hunter and simultaneously has large interests in the arts. His father, Emperor Ludwig, whose mysterious death of Shttarnberger lake is among the events of the stories told German history, supported Richard Wagner. Prince Ludwig unexpectedly located in Jaroslav no less passionate connoisseur of nature and its inhabitants, of customs, of weapons of good outings, tireless, fearless ...

" Tall, slender, with a good view , nice smile , a thick as Chatel neprigladena hair , long mustache, pointed beard , wearing glasses ... " - this seventeen-year Cornelia describes her first impression of nine years older than her still unknown artist Yaroslav . She was with her parents at the resort of Zbraslav . Her enormous family, over 15 people have taken the house of an old fisherman. " My yard is large and great river for all of you " - he said while being installed. . With new insights begin to meet in secret, though her mother does not approve it because he was a man of Bohemia and do not know what the future would . And the instructions are great party ... / brother- and held in Prague private gallery " Rukh " and communicated with a number of artists /



In 1897, at the invitation of the Bulgarian Minister of Education Konstantin Velichkov Czech artist Yaroslav Veshin arrived in Bulgaria to teach at the newly opened School of Art in Sofia. So Veshin became one of the most significant foreign artists who have devoted their lives to Bulgaria .

A lot of courage and adventurousness were needed Yaroslav Veshin to arrive in Bulgaria in 1897 during this risky step the Czech was an established artist who has neither of recognition or money. The only thing that inspired him to come to Sofia, was a noble desire to help a toddler art .

Jaroslav Veshin comes to live in Bulgaria in the name of his Slavic ideal. Risking much.

In Sofia family Veshin first inhabited over the ground , first floor of a corner of the " September 6 " and " Graf Ignatiev " . From below, beneath them are bakery , butcher and grocery .

In 1899 Veshin moved to "L.Karavelov " and " Gourko " - opposite Zoo.

Immediately after arriving in Sofia Veshin started painting various subjects , which reflected domestic scenes , rural labor market dynamic city , romance little-known natural areas. At the same time he continued his work in art school , where dozens of famous artists prepared , including Nikola Petrov , Atanas Mihov , Elizabeth Konsoulova Vazova . In 1903, due to disagreements with the management of the school he left his teaching post. At the same time received an invitation to become a court painter in Germany and Austria- Hungary. But to the astonishment of many of his friends, he preferred Bulgaria .

In 1904 became a war artist and thus established as the father of Bulgarian battle genre painting. Most of his best paintings from this period are shown in the exhibition of the Military Museum . His works reflect the ugly and bloody scenes of two wars (1912-1913) , Morbid and suffering of the people in these crucial years.

Leaving the front along with the army, he managed to create his famous paintings " The Turkish Retreat at Lyuleburgaz " , " on vacation after 13 March " and the famous " Bayonet " became a symbol of the courage of the Bulgarian Army.

Veshin continued to paint almost until his death , which occurred suddenly on May 6, 1915 His outstanding performance was notorious . Renowned literary critic Andrei Ongoing wonders in a letter : "He runs continuously from 6 to 12 and 14 to 18 hours - and at other times observe the battlefield. " So the legacy that Veshin left behind is extremely rich with its historical and artistic value. Moreover - he managed to do what many compatriots do not want or know how - to become fond of Bulgaria more than people born in it.

<http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1860-1915.html>

Vulchev, Nikola	1897-1984	Landscape. figurative	Born in the village of Mokresh, region of Vidin. In 1924 he graduated from the Academy of Arts - Sofia, art of painting the class of Prof. Stefan Ivanov. For long years he was a teacher in Lom and Sofia. For the
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			period 1931-1952 he had lectures in painting at the Institute of Secondary School Masters in Sofia. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=122
Vulchev, Vasil	1931-2002	painting and graphics	graduated 1955 under Ilya Petrov
Vulev, Vassil	1934 -	village life, small groups, portrait	born Sigmen, Burgas. gouache, aquarelle favourite techniques
Vulkev, Pavel	1908-1956	Aquarelles Aquatint engraving	Born Burgas 1936 graduated Sofia Art Academy under Nikola Marinov and Vassil Zahariev (graphics) Focused on port scenes 1953 Reader at Pavlovich Art School, Sofia
Watson, William	1894-??	portraits, landscapes compositions from the urban and rural lifestyle, thematic still-life and painting	born in Paisley, Scotland. During World War I he was an officer. He remained in the Allied mission in Bulgaria and then he settled in Bulgaria. William Watson was educated of a textile engineer. In 1931, he became stockowner and a representative of Bulgaria OOD, Kazanluk for production and trade with threads and textiles. In 1924, he married Theodora Popova - daughter of the regional governor of Varna, Vassil Popov. After 1930 the Watson family settled in Sofia in the house of Professor Al. Balan, N 4 Kliment Ohridski Street. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=11591
Yonkev, Lila	1928-1996	abstract	Hardly a realist - but fascinating stuff.....
Zadgorski, Petko	1902-1974	Seascapes, landscapes	Born Sliven. From early left an orphan, he was raised in the spirit of patriotism and patriotism of his grandmother Anna, Educated at the Art Academy / 1924-1928 / under of Professor Dimitar Gyudzhenov, an artist whose work celebrates Bulgarian history. Then in Burgas and remained there for the rest of his life, his romantic attitude overflows into love for the sea. He studied by the researchers tides, sunsets, which sank somewhere beyond the horizon. Long walks into the sea.... "Fog over raid," "Boats" "Landscape from salinas" impressionist show direction

			of his search. You can almost hear the splash of the waves, the cry of seagulls ... He influences the next generation of artists Burgas - Georgi Baev, Genko Genkov Vladimir Goev, Todor Atanasov. http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/petko-zadgorski-petko-zadgorski/paintings
Zagarov, Spas	1908-1991	graphics; aquarelle landscapes	born village outside Kazanluk; Director Plovdiv municipal art gallery

Zahariev, Vassil

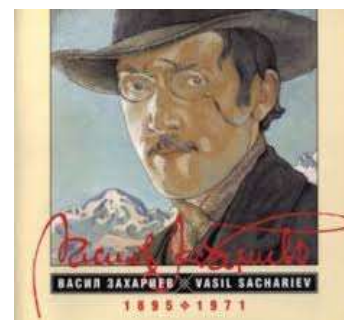
1895-1971

graphics

Born Samokov - considered the founder of Bulgarian graphic.

<http://alneg008.blogspot.com/2013/02/1895-1971.html>

In 1911 he entered the Industrial School of Arts in Sofia, where he graduated in 1919, after a long break (1912-1913 , and 1915-1918) during which took part in the wars in decorative art and graphic Prof. Zeno Todorov, Professor Haralampi Tachev and Stefan Badjov . In 1921, a short time as a teacher in Samokov, but between 1922 and 1924 State Academy specializes in Graphic Arts in Leipzig with Prof. A. Kolb and Professor H. Muller. Since 1924, after his return to Bulgaria , is a professor of graphic and decorative arts at the Art Academy in 1929 - an extraordinary professor , and from 1934 to 1945 - full professor . Vassil Zahariev rector of the Academy between 1939 and 1943 His students are Georgi Gerasimov , Zdravko Alexandrov , Veselin Staikov, Preslav Karshovski , Vasil Stoilov and others.



In 1920 he had his first exhibition in Sofia, which displays his style in the spirit of national tradition , but with a contemporary vision and craftsmanship. Author 's lithographs and black and white and color woodcuts and linoleum .

Zachariev works in the field of applied arts - bookplates , shaping and bookbinding , art addresses, stamps , banknotes and other folk inserting trim. He is the first Bulgarian artist whose works are at the international exhibition of the library sign (in 1929 in Zagreb) . His works are owned by Bulgarian and foreign galleries.

In 1928 initiated the announcement in the Official Gazette a list of architectural and artistic monuments of national importance to be subject to protection of the law for the protection of national antiquities . Zachariev is among the people who have contributed most to the museum in his home town of Samokov. In the period 1959 - 1961, he worked at the BAS Institute of Fine Arts, where he was Head of the Department of Fine Arts .

Zachariev participated in almost all general art exhibitions and exhibitions of "native art" , but particularly large participation in many international general and graphic exhibitions abroad : Zagreb (1927) , Venice (1928 , 1942) , Warsaw (1929 , 1936) , Los Angeles (1934) , Chicago (1937) , Paris (1927) , New York (1938) , Athens (1940) , Berlin (1941-1942) , Budapest (1934) , Prague (1947) , Lugano (1954) , Ljubljana ([955) , London (1955 , 1965) , Moscow (1958) , São Paulo (1963) and others.



Both creative and educational activities. In his research is particularly interested in the Renaissance , applied arts and in particular the illustration and decoration of the book.

Zankov, Doncho

1893-1960

high mountain landscapes, frequently winter ones

Born in Sevlievo.

He was an artist with First Bulgarian Army during the First World War (1914 - 1918).

In 1921 he graduated from the Industrial School of Arts in Sofia.

He worked as teacher in the village of Tarkva, region of Pernik. He was also a teacher in Sofia.

Initially he used to draw water-colour drawings, afterwards oils.

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=42>

His colours are such that I sometimes confuse him with Trichkov



Zhekov,
Atanas

1926-2006

landscapes

Director of Sofia City gallery

Doesn't, in my view, get the recognition he deserves

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=101>



Zhekov, Mario

1898-1955

Coasts and sea

born Stara Zagora..

In 1917 became a student at the Bulgarian Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. Two years later he enrolled in the Painting Drawing School of Paris.

In 1921 he moved to Constantinople Turkey-where he made First Constantinople`s cycle. In this cycle he recreates the Bosphorus. The castle, the port and near the city.

In 1927 returned to Bulgaria and went to the Black Sea-there he painted Sozopol, Nessebar.

In 1930 he moved to the southern Mediterranean Italy, France.
 Two years later he returned to his homeland. Here he finish his second Black Sea cycle-scales of Sozopol and Nessebar, Varna, Balchik, Ropotamo Kamchia and also landscapes.
 In 1937 he moved to Dalmatia. In Dubrovnik he created some of the most important and remarkable of his painting. Many of this works he presented in many galleries in Croatia, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest.
 He became more popular in Europe , than in Bulgaria.
 In 1938. made exhibitions in Stara Zagora and in Sofia. In 1941, went to Greece, Aegean, Aegean Sea, there he painted in the islands of Thassos, Chios, Samothrace and Ohrisdkoto lake.
 In 1943 Mario Zhekov returned to Sofia. With the help of artist Pencho Balkanski organized most representative exhibition. Part of it he shows in Bucharest and in 1946 - in Stara Zagora.

His paintings now normally sell for a minimum of 1,500 euros - and usually much more.

Zhelev, Zahari	1868-1942	Portrait - many of family and friends	Born Kazanluk 1893-98 Turin Art teacher Shumen 1898-1906 From then Kazanluk teacher
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Zhelezarov, Georgi

1897-1982

landscapes, subject paintings, urban sceneries,
 One of the classics of Bulgarian landscape and genre painting.
 After success in 1941, disappears from the artistic scene The circle of friends, with which Georgi Zhelezarov shares his work, is limited to a few, among who his best man Boris Denev, and Preslav Karshovski. His studio though, has no limits. It is Pirin, Rila, Vitosha mountains, the Sofia field, the City Park, Constantinople, Marocco, Florence, Tunise, Algiers (1926-1928).



<http://www.galleryloran.com/authors/georgi-jelezarov-georgi-zhelezarov/paintings>

600 euros 32x42

Zhelyazkov, Gospodin	1873-1937		born Demircha village, Romania. Graduated in painting under Prof. I. Mrkviska and Prof. B. Mitov from the Academy of Fine Arts - Sofia in 1899. Graduated from the Studio of Ilya Repin. Secretary of the Union of the South Bulgarian Artists "Lada" and one of the initiators for the grounding of the Union of the Artists - icon-painters and wood engravers /1925
Zhendov, Alexander	1901-53	cartoons, graphics	born Sofia. As early as 1917 he was contributing cartoons to various magazines. From 1923-25, he was an extra-curricular student in painting at Sofia Art School (under Marinov) One of the "fathers" of the Bulgarian cartoon. 22 of his cartoons are stored in the artistic pool "Humor of Nations", "House of Humour and Satire" in Gabrovo. He also illustrated books. Communist since before World War II,

			Author of many political cartoons and graphics printed in almost all newspapers. In his work has clearly expressed his sympathy for the poor and disadvantaged. Police repression then forced him to seek refuge first in Vienna then Germany (1926-30). He studied graphic and decorative art in Berlin, and in 1930 graduated from the Higher Artistic-Technical Institute in Moscow. Grosz, Kollwitz and Masserel had a great influence on him. Returned to Bulgaria 1930 In 1950 published a critical letter about socialist realism for which he was expelled from the Communist Party and Union of Artists - thereby finding it impossible to get painting commissions.
Zhivkova-Uzunova, Masha	1903-1986	Portraits Landscape, still-life	Born Sofia 1920-23 studied Sofia Art School 1924/25 Munich art school
Zlatareva, Binka	1891-1972		Under Markvichka. Then two years specialized in the Art Gallery in Prague prof. V. Heneis. Works portraits, landscapes, but most works in the field of still life. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=283
Zlatev, Nikola	1907-1989		Born Vratsa Graduated 1932 at the Art Academy in Sofia with Prof. Zeno Todorov and graphic prof. V. Zahariev. From 1934 to 1948 he worked as a teacher. Exhibitions in Svilengrad (1936), Pleven (1938, 1942), Sofia (1946, 1967). He participated in several exhibitions abroad - Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Albania, USA, France, Egypt, USSR and others. http://www.gallery-victoria.com/viewentity.asp?Entity=175

<https://sofia-art-galleries.com/en/art-galleries-in-sofia/>

11. I had [a little list](#)!

My father loved Gilbert and Sullivan operettas - *The Pirates of Penzance* was one of his favourites and the phrase "I have a little list" was, in the last century, a famous catchphrase. [This video starts with a modern spoof](#) - but with the words of the original song inscribed in the last part of the video....My particular "little list" started almost ten years ago when I first became interested in the Bulgarian realist painters of the early part of the 20th Century and found myself one day compiling "a little list" (literally on the back of an envelope!) of the artists whose works my friends in Sofia said I needed to see. By 2012 this had become a small booklet of 56 pages (and a CD) - of which 1000 copies were produced. Since then it has grown to become this book with details of 250 painters!

I said at the start that the best way to learn about a subject is to (try to) write a book about it.....and this, for the moment, is my book.....

It is, of course, a very "partial" take on the country being rather biased toward some aesthetic pleasures which in themselves form only a small part of the rich cultural experience available...

Indeed it's probably only an ignorant foreigner who would have the audacity to try to sketch a picture of a country. Locals tend to be overwhelmed by the scale of work available in their language - and outsiders can sometimes see things they can't. A fellow Scot (Rabbie Burns) put it rather well all of 230 years ago -

*O wad some Power the [giftie gie](#) us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad [frae](#) mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait [wad](#) lea'e us,
[An'](#) ev'n devotion!*

A couple of my Bulgarian friends published recently two massive books - *Ivan Daraktchiev* an amazing 600 page mixture of text and photos on the country and its history (in English) - a passionate tribute to the country he's been out of the country for almost 30 years. And *Ruhmen Manev* has a glorious 700 page collection of old photographs with brief (bilingual) text.

But, two decades ago, I have recently discovered, it was a Belgian academic (Raymond Detrez) who set the gold standard with a 900-page compendium [Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria](#) (the Scarecrow Press 2006). His is a very big "little list"!!

Fortunately, I found that one on the very day I thought I was putting this particular book to bed - I say "fortunately" because if I had known of this opus earlier, I would never have dared put this collection together....

Which perhaps raises the question I should have posed at the very start....what exactly is the purpose of this book?

The purpose of the 2012 booklet was quite clear - it was to help draw the Bulgarian painting tradition to the attention of those foreigners visiting Sofia who were unaware of that tradition....1000 copies (complete with a CD) were printed and distributed to the various municipal galleries, Embassies, a few of the main hotels and my gallery friends..... there's still a yellowing copy propped up in the window of Yassen's little gallery on Asparuh Street and there's a pdf version on

both of my websites - [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#).

I can't say it had any obvious results.....noone has reported on sudden surge of interest in the subject.....But any Bulgarian I present the book to immediately treats me with respect - it's a great calling card!

It was the émigré writer and painter John Berger who, in the early 1970s first used this phrase "[ways of seeing](#)" which I have found myself using with increasing frequency. We're all aware that we all have different ways of looking at the world - some are optimists, others pessimists....Some of us look up at the roofs and sky (with all the risks that involves!) and know that it gives us a very different view of things from that of those who keep their eyes lower and almost seem to be looking for a lost bank-note!

Living in a foreign country - not watching television or reading the newspapers - is like looking at a country through the wrong end of a telescope.....it distances you.....old books assume greater significance for you....the faces of long-dead artists reach out to you from black and white photographs.....and have you thinking about the lives they led.....

I find myself looking at the paintings which grace my walls and litter the bookcases and imagining the creative process - no matter whether it was 5 months, 5 or 50 years ago....Seeing Spartak Dermendjiev work on my clay bust for 2 days has helped me appreciate all the more the hesitations and exasperations which are part of that process.

Each artist has captured a moment in time.

And every life is and has been a series of such moments - which it behoves us to live well.....

Carpe Diem!!

Annex 1: Notes on the National and regional Galleries

Bulgaria is a great country to tour around. Amazing scenery, great wines and food! Its many municipal galleries are an additional bonus.

Here I simply reproduce the comments I posted on my blog after my visits - and, regrettably, I have not been able to visit them all. Burgas and Sinistra, for example, remains to be conquered.

Please note that this information is correct at the time of printing but should be verified.

Sofia

Sofia City Art Gallery

1, Gen. Gurko Str

Website: <http://sghg.bg>

working hours:

Tuesday-Saturday: 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Monday: day off

admission: now charges 3 leva (pensioners free)

The City Gallery has no permanent exhibition but plays a crucial role in putting on special exhibitions which not only bring out paintings from its own large collection but exhibit paintings from the other municipal and private collections. Exhibitions in recent years have focussed on people such as Dobri Dobrev and Nikolay Boiadjiev. In 2010, the Gallery curator Dr. Maria Vassileva started a fascinating series ("The other Eye") which consists of inviting outsiders to comb the dungeons of the gallery where the collections are stored, strip off the protective covering and select some paintings. So far, three such exhibitions have been held - each with a very useful booklet.

The National Gallery

1 Prince Alexander Sq

<http://www.nationalartgallerybg.org/index.php?l=59>

closed Mondays

A lovely building which was, previously, the Royal Palace.....A fitting fate - if only Buckingham Palace were so used!!

I'm always a bit iffy about the place - its management is so much less imaginative than that of the City Gallery just 5 minutes' walk across the square - the contrast to me showing the superiority of municipal management!! For more on this see [the interesting conversation](#) I had with the Director of another City Gallery.

Their catalogues which are supposed to accompany exhibitions now rarely arrive during the exhibition - 6 months after the superb exhibition in August 2014 of Moutafov seascapes, we still await the catalogue.....

And, despite the example set across the road by the municipal gallery, they rarely take paintings out of their extensive archives.....

Lack of translation is another of the features which used to distinguish the National Gallery from the municipal one whose catalogues have been bilingual for quite some years. Pricing is a third - the National Gallery used to charge 5 euros (now 3 - with pensioners half price). The municipal gallery was free - until last year when a nominal charge was introduced (with pensioners free).

It reminded me of one of my political colleagues in the 1970s [Janey Buchan](#) (who became an MEP in 1979), She was a tireless advocate in the 60s of the rights of ordinary people (before the days of the Consumer Association) and was particularly strong on the importance of free entry to museums and art galleries, Thatcher put pressure on to introduce charges ([although the British Museum held out](#)) but entry was made free again in 2001 - with significant subsequent increases in visitors.

So let me take my hat off to them for their display in December of digital facilities. I was a bit annoyed to be denied access to an exhibition of Nouveau Art's Nikola Rainov (for reasons of some private party) but was placated by being given the opportunity to use a smart phone to access some 200 watercolours of the past century which have not so far been available to the public - along with useful information about the painters. This is apparently part of a wider project of gradual digitization of the entire archive of the museum in 2015. Nous y verrons!!

I managed to see the Rainov exhibition the following day - you don't often see his work. And it was accompanied by a superb small catalogue - sadly almost entirely monolingual.

Running in a neighbouring room, was another delightful small exhibition of urban life here a hundred years ago - with a charming video of an elderly lady displaying various artefacts from the period.

And my ever-ready camera was able to catch this shot of a very sharply-dressed visitor to the gallery.....with a Rainov display behind....

Atelier and Collection of Svetlin Roussev

18 Vrabcha St

02 987 96 98

- An amazing place I discovered only recently. Roussev is Bulgaria's Grand Old Man of Art. Painter, and Art Historian, he amassed a large collection of Bulgarian art (during his time as Chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Artists) which he has gifted to two public collections - one in Pleven, the other in Sofia at what used to be his studio very near the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

It also contains a huge library of art books which is freely available for consultations

Gallery of Union of Bulgarian Artists

6 Shipka St

Website - http://www.sbhart.com/en/exhibition_places/237-gallery-of-uba-shipka-6

The first place anyway with any interest in art should go!! First for its useful noticeboard with posters of current exhibitions you can see in the various private galleries....

Has 3 large exhibition halls - generally operational.

THE REGIONAL GALLERIES

At one stage I thought I had managed to visit all Bulgaria's Regional galleries (apart from Burgas), but I then kept discovering yet another village museum - eg Sevlievo or, in Feb 2017, Pernik's)

Balchik Art Gallery

4 Otets Paisiy St

tel.: +359 579 41 30 +359 579 41 30 , 43 09

The small town which clings to the white sandstone cliffs is popular with both Bulgarians and Romanians - it is only 30 kilometres or so from the border and did indeed belong to Romania for almost 30 years. After the Second Balkan War, in 1913, the town, styled Balcic, became part of the Kingdom of Romania and was much loved by its Queen Mary. It was regained by Bulgaria during World War I (1916-1919), but Romania restored its authority when hostilities in the region ceased. Quite a lot of the Romanian bourgeoisie built villas - many of which have collapsed due to the soil subsidence which is a problem in the area.

But in 1940, just before the outbreak of World War II in the region, Balchik was ceded by Romania to Bulgaria. When we were last here - 10 years ago (on the way back from a trip to Turkey) - our landlady lowered her voice to speak Romanian

The town's art gallery has paintings from that period by Romanian artists - who were charmed by the strong muslim air the town had in those days. [The gallery's website](#) understandably uses the language of "occupation" when it talks about "the group of eleven Romanian artists who have painted Balchik during the occupation of Dobroudzha". The group includes two favourites of mine - Alexandru Satmari and Samuel Mutzner. Many Bulgarian artists have taken the air here - not least Mario Zhekov - and the area also boasts famous cliffs further north which figure in many paintings.

Sadly, however, the permanent collection was closed - due to reconstruction (as with Shumen, the charming young woman could offer no firm date for its re-opening). But a few of the Romanian paintings were on display - as well as a temporary exhibition of paintings by an 84 year old Nedelcho Nanov - mostly miniatures of the area painted variously in the 1960s and 2000s. He is now based in Sofia - and this "Interior" was, for me, particularly intriguing.



Burgas

Petko Zadgorski Gallery

"Metropolit Simeon" Str.24

tel: +359 56/84-21-69

<http://www.burggallery.org/index.php>

- one of the few municipal galleries I have not yet visited

http://www.burggallery.org/authors.php?category_id=1

Dobrich Art Gallery

9300 Dobrich, 14 Bulgaria, Bulgaria St

tel.: +359 58 28 215 +359 58 28 215 , 29 091

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculpture

Highlights: works by Vladimir Dimitrov- the Master, Bencho Obreshkov, Alexander Petrov, Ivan Markvichka, Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Dechko Ouzounov, Naiden Petkov and others, a collection of foreign prints.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 1 - 5 p.m.

Closed: summer: Sundays and Mondays; winter: Saturdays and Sundays

The Director very graciously gave us a personal tour of her domain. It started with a group of schoolkids who were receiving some interactive training in the process of paper-making - the gallery, uniquely, has a collection of paperworks produced by the participants of a recent international event held here.

Separate sections are devoted to the gallery's collection of sculptures and prints - and to local artists as well as old masters such as a rare work of Ivan Mrkvichka (1856-1938), one of two Czechs (the other is Jaroslav Vesin) who are credited with setting Bulgarian painting on its modern path.

The breadth of the collection is one of the widest I have seen (with a nice mix of older and contemporary).

The exhibition space is so extensive that the tour took more than an hour.

I was very taken with some contemporary work by Plaven Valchev (born 1951).

I have been nicely received in all the municipal galleries I have visited in the Bulgaria regions - but this is the only one where I was able to have a proper conversation about the problems of running galleries here at this time. Over a cup of tea, Evelina (like all the Directors I've met here) an artist herself explained that it is the Ministry of Culture who set a formula which dictates the number of staff to which regional galleries are entitled. So much for local government autonomy!! And, in Dobrich's case, with such a huge palace, the staff of 12 (including 2 cleaners and 3 attendants) is simply insufficient. There is no surveillance system - so security is labour-intensive.

As was evident from the number of brochures, the Director is highly proactive in seeking out opportunities for marketing and funding (A Swiss Foundation was mentioned) and the Gallery's CD lists the various international exhibitions (eg China and Slovakia) which have been mounted with the support of Embassies here. But it is an uphill struggle - a good venture of bussing tourists from the beaches nearby during the summer fizzled out. It is not easy to produce a winning formula for such a problem. But one thing is clear for me - it requires local solutions and this means removing the dead hand of central control - and encouraging networking between galleries (national and international), hotels, businesses (eg the new owners of the rich agricultural land and the golf courses!!) and educational establishments.

Don't get me wrong - national financial support needs to be maintained (otherwise the galleries could be at more risk)) but on the basis of more imagination.....

Kardjali

Stanka Dimitrova art gallery

Kardjali has all the bustle and townscape of a Turkish town. I was able, with some difficulty, to locate the art gallery - rather small but some great paintings - including the great Atanas Mihov and the delightful Stefan Ivanov.

Kavarna

The Art Gallery

9650 Kavarna, Bulgaria, 1 Aheloi St
tel.: +359 570 84 236 +359 570 84 236

Kazanluk Art Gallery

Permanent exhibition

Address: SS Cyril and Methodius "№ 9

Contacts: Tel: 0431 / 63762 E-mail [artgallery.kz @ gmail.com](mailto:artgallery.kz@gmail.com)

You can access a sample of [Kazanlak Art Gallery's](#) offerings on the link....

In addition to the magic of the rose and the oil wealth of the Thracian art, Kazanlak is also famous as a city of artists. Here, many artists are born, some of which have marked some of the highest peaks in Bulgarian art, such as: Ivan Milev, Ivan Penkov, Dechko Uzunov, Nenko Balkanski, Vasil Barakov and others. It is therefore not accidental that Kazanlak owns one of the oldest and richest art galleries in the country.

I was warmly received by the staff who introduced me to their collection which includes several pieces by one of my favourite Bulgarian painters - Stanio Stamatov - one of many local painters. Indeed the small town was so prolific with artists that it used to be called "the town of a hundred painters". The collection is therefore a rich one - of both paintings and sculptures - and, amongst those whose acquaintance I made were Vasil Barakov (1902-1991); a sculptor Hristo Peshev (1923-2000); and Spas Zavgrov (1908-1991) born in a nearby village whose landscapes and portrait sketches were in a temporary exhibition funded by his family. Hristo Genev, the Director, welcomed me into his den and presented me with a couple of discs (one of his own material). He sculpts the most fascinating pieces from wood. This is a gallery worth a detour to see - and many revisits!

Kyustendil

Vladimir Dmitrov (Maistora) Gallery

"Patriarh Evtimii" St. No. 20

78-55-0029: Curator

78-52-3172: Director

Opening Hours

Summer time : 09:00 - 12:00 14:00 - 18:00

Winter time: 09:00 - 12:00 13:00 - 17:00

Housed in the ugliest concrete bunker I have ever seen. Dmitrov (The Master) is one of Bulgaria's most famous painters. I'm not actually a fan of a lot of his stuff particularly not one of his trademarks - a face in front of a lot of crudely painted and brightly coloured flowers - but it was good to visit this collection and see a wider range of his paintings. I was taken with some of his earlier, smaller paintings - sunrises and sunsets; his mother; his father - and some multiple face silhouettes. His *Peasant with a hoe* which is in the Sofia City Gallery is very graceful.

Pazardzhik

Stanislaw Dospevski Gallery

Pazardzhik Square. "Konstantin Velichkov" 15

tel. +359 34445721

Website: <http://artgallerydospevski.com/>

Opening hours -

Monday - Saturday 9.00 am. - 17.00 pm.

Sunday 10.00. - 14.00.

A small gallery - which is supposed to house more than 2000 paintings donated by one of Pazardzhik's most famous sons, the painter Stoian Vasilev. I could find no sign of them however! The first of the gallery's 2 rooms - with still lifes - was bitterly disappointing but things were made up with the portrait room which had a wonderful display of Elisabeth Konsulova-Vaseva

Pernik

<http://gallery.pernik.org/autors.html>

Галерия "Любен Гайдаров"

пл. ""Кракра" №1

тел. 076 60 19 83

Pleven

Iliya Beshkov Gallery

Director - phone/fax: + 359 64/802091

Working hours:

9.00 - 12.00 a.m., 1.00 - 5.00 p.m.

Closed: Sunday and Monday

The first floor presents the works of Nikolay Pavlovich, Anton Mitov, Ivan Markvicka, Tseno Todorov, Stefan Ivanov, David Perez and many others. The sculptures of Ivan Lazarov, Angel Spasov, Ivan Funev, Marko Markov and other sculptors who had worked in the period to 1940 are included in the exposition.

To mark the 105th anniversary of the birthday of Bulgaria's master caricaturist, Pleven Art Gallery (named in Beshkov's honour) published this lovely little E-book [Iliya Beshkov 1901-1958](#)

However, I have to award this gallery only the second black mark I have used in all my trips to Bulgarian regional and national galleries. They refused to allow me to photograph the paintings - although I use no flash and the gallery offers no books whose sales might suffer from art enthusiasts with cameras.

To add to my anger I was informed that if I sent a written request in advance, I would be allowed.....(as if day trippers could take advantage of such dubious offers)

It was so cold on my last (winter's) visit that I had been left alone - the attendants, wrapped in their furcoats had been huddled in a side-room in front of an electric heater!

Needless to say, a protesting E-mail to the mayor's office went unanswered.

So bad marks to an unwelcoming Pleven.....I will not forget the woman whose spiteful hand tried to block a Boris Denev painting I really wanted to have to join the small file I have on one of my favourite Bulgarian painters.....

Svetlin Russev Collection

Pleven also hosts the art collection of one of Bulgaria's most famous artists, art functionary and collector

Plovdiv

The old town of Plovdiv is well worth a visit - with its cobbled streets, stunning National Revival houses, Roman amphitheatre and several galleries.

City Art Gallery

"Saborna" St. No. 14a

32-635-322: Director

www.galleryplovdiv.com

working hours (summer);

Open every day (Thursday free)

10.00-12.30

13.00-18.00

Art Gallery-Museum Philippopolis

29 Saborna str., Plovdiv 4000, Bulgaria

e-mail: gallery@philippopolis.com

tel.: +359 32 622 742

tel.: +359 32 624 851

This is actually a private gallery housed in a magnificent old Bulgarian house in the old heart of the town which was rescued and brought back to its glory by the new owners. Now you can view their collection; contemplate possible purchases; eat in a wonderful restaurant in the basement; or have a quiet coffee on the terrace which overlooks the town. Its website [has a virtual gallery](#) which allows you to see for yourself. It was a visit to the Philippopolis Gallery in Plovdiv in May 2008 which really activated my painting passion. The atmosphere and reception was so great that, without at that stage knowing anything at that stage about Bulgarian painting, I bought a small Zhekov; a large Mechkuevska and two contemporaries. So, be warned!

[Atanas Krastev House](#)

The [Atanas Krastev house](#) should be visited - where local painter and conservationist *Atanas Krastev* lived until his death in 2003. His constant striving to keep the old buildings (at a time in the 1960s when tradition was viewed with some hostility) and to have them as active centres of cultural activity earned him the title of *Mayor of Old Plovdiv* - and he deserves wider recognition. The cosy, well-furnished house is strewn with personal mementoes, and the terrace offers superb views. His self-portraits and personal collection of (mostly) abstract 20th-century Bulgarian paintings are displayed. The garden also houses exhibits.

Razgrad - The Art Gallery

the modern green building beside the central Mosque

tel.: +359 84 27 067 +359 84 27 067 , 29 618

Exposition: a standing exhibition and temporary thematic exhibitions of paintings, prints and sculptures.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 3- 7 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

Housed in a superb, modernised and specially-designed building (with EC funding) in the heart of the town right next to the well-kept mosque, it has an enthusiastic Director, Todor Todorov, who personally showed us round the collection on display. This included about 6 Danail Dechevs, a Tanev, a Boris Denev, several Vladimir Dimitrovs and two painters until then unknown to me - Maxim Tsankov (1877-1965) and Kosta Petrov (1894-1973).

Razgrad's permanent exhibition also includes an excellent graphics collection.

The gallery's catalogue is the best I have seen - with coloured reproductions and English as well as Bulgarian notes on the paintings and painters. It also has a website - although still, clearly, in the process of construction.

The Razgrad Gallery is the only one I have seen which has used Regional Funds to make such a major refurbishment - which shows both official initiative and political support.

Razgrad's gallery must go to the top of my unofficial list of best housed, managed and documented regional galleries in Bulgaria - with Stara Zagora a close second. Russe is the worst. Of course, these are not necessarily the best criteria - for example the poorly-housed Targovishte Gallery was abuzz with a group of

school-kids - and the unheated Skitnik gallery in Sliven sponsors an annual Plein Air summer school. Such local access and use should clearly be the core of the mission of any art gallery.

I find these differences an interesting example of the effects and importance of local government - although the proper maintenance of older paintings which are part of a country's national patrimony has national significance. The lack of heating which threatens so many paintings in Bulgaria's regional art galleries is a disgrace - but perhaps it is too easy to put this down to lack of municipal funding. I found it curious that one of the galleries I visited had 7 staff. Of course I never like to recommend job-shedding but, in this case, perhaps lack of heating simply shows a poor sense of budgetary priorities!

A superb (bilingual) [Catalogue can be accessed here](#) - with one painting illustrating each page. [Graphics here](#). And a [nice sense of the new gallery here](#)

Russe Art Gallery

Somewhere in the centre!

<http://ruseartgallery.weebly.com/10501086108310771082109410801080.html>

The gallery is in a scandalous state for such a large city - with no heating and the paintings in one of the three rooms lying propped on the floor with no means of identification. Some superb works from Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistera, Atanas Mihov, Benchko Obreshkov and Nenko Balkanski - all, however, at risk from the disgraceful conditions. What was even more galling was that an expensive book was on offer - at 25 euros - celebrating 75 years of the gallery. It must have cost 5,000 euros to produce - money which would have been much better spent to keep the paintings in a safer condition.

I can understand the galleries of smaller municipalities being in poor conditions - but there is absolutely no excuse for this neglect for a city such as Russe. Places like *Razgrad* and *Kazanlak* - with one fifth of the population - clearly do so much better! Pity the poor young warden who sat wrapped up and freezing in his cubicle as I happily snapped the choicer exhibits. He smiled sadly when I asked if there was a feedback book available for me to make my comments! At the very least, the city authorities should relocate the paintings to a smaller place which is easier to heat! And it doesn't take much money to produce a CD of the gallery collection.

<http://ruseartgallery.weebly.com/1046108010741086108710801089.html>

Sevlievo

Shumen

The Elena Karamihailova Art Gallery

81 Tsar Ivan Alexander St

tel.: +359 54 42 126 +359 54 42 126

Exposition: paintings, prints and sculptures

Highlights: works by Elena Karamihailova, Alexander Moutafov, Hristo Kazandzhiev, Ilia Petrov, Vasil Stoilov, Dechko Ouzounov, Nikola Mihailov.

Open: 9 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.
Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

The town of Shumen (80 kms from Varna and the Black Sea) is a bit unprepossessing as you drive in - with decaying 1950s residential blocks. But its centre is a pleasant surprise, with one the largest pedestrian areas I have ever seen - with trees, a theatre, statues and a mountain range behind. Its upper side is graced with a series of old, large official buildings - of which a mock Italian palace (the police station) is perhaps the most interesting.

Younger people we asked about the location of The *Elena Karamihaylova Gallery* clearly had never visited the place - but two elderly ladies pointed us in the right direction. The gallery was initially a disappointment - since the second floor containing the permanent collection was closed for reconstruction. But conversations with the staff must have conveyed our love of Bulgarian painting and the Director graciously presented us with an attractive pack containing 20 postcards of the paintings, a CD and a small booklet giving the history of the collection and short notes on the artists.

When, however, I mentioned the name Alexander Moutafov (who was apparently born in Shumen), it was literally the key to open an Aladdin's Cave. Valentina Velikova, the paintings expert, took us to the archives where the collection (of 1,300 items) is stored and filed. And she was kind enough to find and pull out for our inspection various portraits by Elena Karamihaylova and paintings by Nikola Tanev, Alexander Moutafov and Stanio Stamatov. Marvellous to have a chance to handle such work. And great that a small gallery should have developed such a nice pack. They are rare amongst Regional galleries in having a CD. It is so simple, cheap to create - and so necessary given the large numbers of paintings which are doomed to spend their life in basement archives!

Silistra Art Gallery

Svoboda Sq
tel.: +359 86 26 838 +359 86 26 838 , 22 395

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculptures

Highlights: works by Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Danail Dechev, Stoyan Venev, Tsanko Lavrenov, Vasil Stoilov, Bencho Obreshkov, Nenko Balkanski.

Open: 8 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.
Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

- still to visit

Sliven

The city's "Dimitar Dobrevich" gallery has three permanent expositions:

- Contemporary Bulgarian art - **gallery hall "Sirak Skitnik"**, 2 "Tzar Simeon" Blvd., tel. +359 44/ 25342
- The Old Sliven - paintings of Dobri Dobrev in the "**Mirkovich**" house, 10 "Mirkovich" Str., tel. +359 44/ 22796
- Christian Art - **Christian Art**, 13 Tzar Osoboditel Blvd., tel. +359 44/ 22083

Art Gallery "Dimitar Dobrevich" works everyday from Monday to Friday,
from 09.00-12.00 and 13.30-17.00.

Non working days: Saturday and Sunday.

The home of Dobri Dobrev. And the town has done Dobrev proud - with some 50 of his paintings on permanent display in a superb National Revival house - Mirkovitch House. I was taken to the Gallery by one of the curators of the nearby *Sirak Stitnik Gallery* which is the town's main gallery who had been kind enough to show me round it. It has a great collection - not only the country's greats such as Tanev, Abadjiev and Boris Denev but a special exhibition of the graphics of a new painter for me - Kozucharov, Nikola (1892-1971). He's famous apparently for his mythological and historical paintings but was also a war artist - covering the Balkan War and First World Wars - and some of these sketches were on display. Unfortunately, there was no heating in the place - like the Russe and Targovishte galleries

Smolyian

Dicho Petrov 7

tel: 0301 62 328

open; 09:00-12:00 & 13:30-17:00 Tue-Sun

A great collection - well worth the trip. And in a Rhodope town in a superb location.

Amongst other local artists, I was introduced to the work of Anastas Staikov by a Slovak woman who guided us around and introduced us to the Director.

What struck me was what they were achieving against the odds - they had insufficient money for proper maintenance - let alone advertise the gallery and its great paintings.

Stara Zagora Art Gallery

Address: Stara Zagora, 27 Ruski Blvd.

Working time: tue-sat 10:00-18:00

Phone: 042 62 28 43

Phone: 042 62 23 80

<http://artgallerystz.com/>

The town has a superb location with the Balkan mountains as a majestic backcloth. It was completely destroyed by the Turks in 1877 for welcoming the Russian army of General Gurko and was subsequently rebuilt on a strict grid-plan with leafy Boulevards.

I therefore had no problems finding the Art gallery which is a most impressive one - well maintained and offering, for 1 euro, 3 separate exhibitions.

The permanent exhibition displays some of the works of the many painters who have been born and worked there - eg Anton Mitov, Mario Zhekov and Atanas Mihov. Paintings by Nikola Tanev, Ivan Penkov and Moutafov were also on display.

The Gallery also offered a collection of women's portraits and, finally, a display of woodcuts and graphics in a temperature controlled room.

The exhibits were so enthralling I spent almost two hours in total there - with a return visit after the lunchbreak. Many new names - eg Vasil Marinov and a great portraitist Elizabeth Konsulova-Vazova (1881-1965)

Targovishte

The Nikola Marinov Art Gallery

Park "Borovo Oko"

tel.: +359 601 27 760 +359 601 27 760

Exposition: paintings, prints, sculpture

Highlights: a collection of water colours by Nikola Marinov

Open: 8 - 12 a.m., 2- 6 p.m.

Closed: Saturdays and Sundays

The gallery has a rather remote location (at least for present wintry conditions) in a park on the town's periphery next to a lake which must be glorious in summer (and also to the football stadium). From the outside its cavernous size held some promise - but this was quickly dashed by the iciness of the air as we stepped inside. There was no heating (and loud leaks from the roofs) for the Gallery's 2 huge rooms - which held little of interest. One Neron and one Svetlin Russe which must be fast deteriorating in such conditions. No sign of the Marinov water colours which I learned about later!

Tryavna

<http://www.en.tryavna-museum.eu/modern-art-in-tryavna-bulgaria>

Varna

Georgi Velchev Art Museum

8 R. Dimitriev St

tel.: +359 52 238 011 +359 52 238 011

Exposition: paintings and drawings by one of the best masters of sea-scapes in Bulgaria. Landscapes from France, Germany and Bulgaria, portraits and self-portraits by Georgi Velchev (1891-1955).

They have been considerate enough to put online 136 pages of superb reproductions - click -

[The Treasures of Varna City Art Gallery](#) (2013)

Open: summer 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.;

winter 13 p.m. - 5 p.m.

Closed: summer- Mondays,

winter- Saturdays and Sundays

Varna - Boris Georgiev Gallery

1 L. Karavelov St

tel.: +359 52 243 123 +359 52 243 123 , 243 141

tel./fax: +359 52 243 088

Exposition: on 1600 square metres: West European art of the 17th century, Bulgarian art from the beginning of the century, contemporary Bulgarian art.

Highlights: works of art of national importance: Vladimir Dimitrov- the Master - "A young girl with grapes", "Prayer"; Zlatyu Boyadzhiev- "Rest in the fields", 1943, "Opening mines Pernik"; [paintings by Ivan Markovichka, St. Ivanov, Vasil Stoilov, Tsanko Lavrenov](#), Dechko Ouzounov, Stoyan Venev; sculptures by Kiril Shivarov;; collection of west European art.

Open: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Closed: Mondays

Veliko Tarnovo

Boris Denev Art Gallery

"Park Asenevtsi"

(0)62-638-961: Director

(0)62-638-951: Curator

(0)62-638-941: Ticket window

opening hours

10.00- 18.00

closed; Mondays



The walk across a footbridge over the River Yantra offers the perspective of the ancient town given by [this painting](#)

The Gallery was originally built in the 1970s as an Art School but actually opened as a police station! Very symbolic! It was eventually opened as an ArtGallery in the mid 1980s.

The Director showed me round a great collection - 2 Tanevs on display and a room and a corridor devoted entirely to Boris Denev's work - the room with about 7 large oil paintings of the town and the corridor with aquarelles mainly of Italian scenes.

This is a moving portrayal of his mother.

Vidin

Was closed when I tried to visit in early 2016

.....
Note also that several villages - eg **Berkovitsa** in Vidin Region and **Izvorovo** village in Targovishte Region - apparently have galleries - the first focussing on the work of Dragonov, the second on Kutzkarev

Annex 2: Private galleries in Sofia which offer "realistic" Bulgarian painters of the mid-20th Century

Antique Design

Ul Kniaz Boris I no 94

0885 820 152

- a new small gallery with a nice selection of old masters...

Antique Shop and Gallery

33 ??? Tsar Assen St

- new location of my friend Dr Stefan Stefanov's gallery - it may not have quite the same welcoming atmosphere of the large mysterious basement gallery he had off Vasil Levski Boulevard (Inter Nos) but a welcome there still is and also many surprise packed away in rows.....

Antique Shop and Gallery

40 (?) Tsar Assen St

- this gallery has three rooms with an interesting selection of older paintings - some from outside Bulgaria.

Antique Shop and Gallery

34 Solunska St

- looks a bit kitsch from outside with a dummy in soldier uniform but they have some worthwhile stuff inside. The son speaks English.

Baltoff

37 Ezrah Yosiff St

www.antiques.bg

- another antique shop with an interesting selection of older paintings and one of my recent discoveries (although the gallery has been next to the Lidl supermarket at the area with the old Mosque for more than 6 years). The owner edited the catalogue for the exhibition of Rusi Ganchev paintings which was the first I saw at the National Gallery in 2007.

Barnev and Doychev Art

15 San Stefano St

- charming small gallery in the University area - on the doctors' square. More than meets the eye since they have a lot of paintings in piles against the wall. They speak English.

Bulgari

69 Bvd Dondukov

www.gallery.bulgary.bg

- part of a larger complex which includes a lovely restaurant (on the top floor you can dine in real privacy amongst some of the paintings). Sadly the gallery has now closed (late 2014) although I understand that paintings can still be accessed from the restaurant

Classica

32, Liuben Karavelov St

0896 854210

- a charming old converted flat near the crossroads of Ignatiev and Vessil Levski. A fairly small selection on display - although you can view on their computer other paintings they can bring for you. But they do quote rather high prices.

Enakor Gallery and Auction House

30, Ivan Denkozly St

0888 639484

Julia Varbanova speaks excellent English

Up until November 2015 I thought Victoria gallery was Sofia's only auction house but [Enakor](#) started strongly in summer 2015 and held 4 auctions in 2015 - the premises are probably the best Sofia has to offer.....

Their online catalogues can be accessed on the link.....In a way I'm relieved (or my chequebook is) that I've been missing out.....This is their [November 2015 catalogue](#)

Finesse gallery

17, Hristo Belchev (just off Vitosha pedestrianised street)

To contact: Mariela Tabakova

Phone.: 02/986 25 90

Mobile: +359 887 853 285

<http://www.fines-bg.net/>

- housed in the most superb old house!! Always worth a visit...since they offer both classic and contemporary works. My friend Yovo exhibits here - and in February 2015 there was a rare and fantastic Tanev exhibition.....!!!

Galleria-Antiques

38 Tsar Assen St

0887 600 194

- Alexander Aleksiev's wonderful tiny aladdin's cave where I have found some lovely old stuff...

Galleria Seasons

2a Krakra St

<http://www.galleryseasons.com/en/about>

- Sofia's oldest gallery (since 1993), it also offers musical events.

Galeria Velev

Ul Solunska 34

0886 637087

Vladimir Velev

- new in 2015 - an expansion of the father's neighbouring antique shop. Some exquisite old masters for 500 euros plus.....

IKAR Gallery

26/30 Bacho Kivo St

- a small unit on the ground floor of an hotel. Ran recently an exhibition in the hotel foyer of Zelezharov paintings.

Impression Art

Valeri Filipov

11 Vasil Levsky Bvd

0898 566 667

- Valeri has recently moved to this more up-market (and contemporary art) gallery but still has a stock of the older works he displayed in his previous gallery (Valmar). He has great sources - and is worth cultivating. He speaks English.

Kristar Gallery

100, Rakovski St

0896 621113

- well established gallery with a small but select collection. The lady speaks English.

Kristar Gallery

Nikolai Golemanov

11 Khan Krum St

0887 989977

- mix of interesting older artists and more modern.... a bit too eager to do a sale for my taste.

Loran Gallery

Laven Petrov

16 Oborishte St86

0888 920 7

www.galleryloran.com

- a small but select gallery which mounts exhibitions every couple of months - focusing on Bulgarian painters from the last century. Their website has a good collection of paintings - a nice feature being the portraits of the 100 or so artists in the list. The gallery occasionally produce special books on artists. The young ladies have excellent English.

Neron

Rumen Manov

Tsar Samuel 12

0887 43 10 76

- at corner with Rilski St. A man with a passion. Has the best collection of the older painters with paintings piled all around the small space and downstairs basement. His appreciation of Bulgarian history shown in the time and care he has devoted to two large books, one on his hometown, Kyustendil, the other a 700 page book consisting of his photographic collection of old Bulgaria. We use Russian to converse...

Nirvana

Sofia, 17 Angel Kanchev str.

Telephone: [+359 889 888833](tel:+359889888833)

Web: <http://nirvana-gallery.bg/>

Opened in October 2015 and housed in a superb 1920s house in the centre (just off Solunska St), this gallery has so far offered exhibitions of classic Bulgarian painters such as Barakaov.

Nuance Art gallery

www.nuancegallery.bg

Ivan Denkoglou 42

3592 44 85 854

- one of Sofia's most appealing presentations of "modern" Bulgarian art - Chokanov, Mihov, Moutafov, Tanev etc. The prices are a bit steep however

Rakurski Gallery

Roumyana Yoneva

4a, Kan Khrum St

www.rakurski.com

02 981 2617

- smallish but prestigious gallery just off Rakovski where they present a mix of classical and modern work. I hear they do auctions - but I've never seen any publicity about them.....

Rita Gallery

Meri Magri

14 Vrabcha St

0888 408 602

- tiny little gallery, just along from the Opera with tasteful paintings and sculptures.

Sredets Gallery

17, Al. Stamboliiski Blvd.

- part of the Ministry of Culture

Stari Maisteri Gallery

13, Parehevich St

- very small antique shop with a few paintings.

Tzennosti (Values) Gallery

Buzludja St 17 (Iulin Planina)

02.953 1315

<http://www.values-gallery.com/galleries/browse/2>

- a well-established (and apparently prestigious) gallery focussing on Bulgaria's old masters - hidden away in a charming and old part of Sofia between Prague Bvd and Bvds Makedonia/Totleben. It has the richest collection (in more senses than one) of all the galleries I have visited here (the website gives a good sense of what's available).

There were so many painters of whom I hadn't heard. Some of the paintings seem to have been there for several years (eg some Vladimir Dmitrov's at 20,000 euros in the 2009 Antiques Price Guide) - which makes one wonder about their business model. Clearly they cater for bigger spenders than me! Probably an institutional market ie the banks!

Victoria Gallery

Yuri Gagarin 22a

0888 572 172 (Pavlina)

<http://www.gallery-victoria.com/catalog.asp>

- Until recently, Sofia's only auction house! Pavlina is very knowledgeable! Their website is the most comprehensive for this older, more classic sort of Bulgarian painting. And, for each of their (quarterly) auctions, they produce a great little Catalogue - free of charge.
The auctions - generally at the Sheraton Hotel - are a great experience.

Vida Gallery

Proprieter; Marina Marinova

16 Iskar St (although entrance is round the corner on Budapest St!)

tel 0888 69 27 95

<http://www.vida-gallery.com/artists>

The gallery has a good collection of Bulgarian painters ... and also western paintings and lithographs (Pascin, Steinlen, Vlaminck, Toulouse Lautrec) but they also have some very interesting pieces of african and asian art

Update; I hear it will be closing the gallery soon to focus on its online business

Annex 3: Contemporary Art Galleries

Although my main interest is the realist painting from the middle of the 20th Century, I do have more than 20 paintings by contemporary artists - Milcho Kostadinov, Yuliana Sotirova and Angela Minkova were three of my early favourites. And I have learned so much (and spent many happy hours) in two galleries in central Sofia in particular which focus on contemporary art, ceramics and sculpture - namely -

KONUS Gallery

32, Khan Asparuh St

- Yassen Gollev (here he is with one of his surrealist paintings)

0898 537673

www.konusgallery.net



ASTRY Gallery

34, Tsar Samuil St

proprietar - Vihra Pesheva



02 986 3780

0885 230717

www.astrogallery.com

Every two months or so, Vihra organises a special exhibition of a contemporary artist - duly opened with a delightful Vernissaj

Let me also mention Sofia's only gallery dealing with aquarelles - a new arrival which has already established a niche by virtue of its frequent exhibitions and reasonable prices.

ABSINTHE Gallery

Proprietor - Daiana Staikova

Tsar Samuil St 47

+359 887 608 900

Also

10 Gallery

100, Knaz Boris 1

888 109610

New in 2016 and around the corner from Astry gallery, the gallery is owned by 10 contemporary artists and shows their work. Well worth a visit...

Gallery Seasons

Ul Krakra 2a

- apparently well-established (since 1993) but completely unknown to me until very recently

<http://www.galleryseasons.com/en/gallery>

Annex 4: My Library

One of my hobbies is to trawl Sofia's galleries and bookshops - particularly the second-hand ones. As a result I have accumulated a library of more than a hundred books (mostly in the Bulgarian language) of detailed studies of Bulgarian artists.

It may, I appreciate, be a bit eccentric to list them - but it is my only real way of keeping track of them.....they include, in chronological order,

- **Art Modern Bulgare**; Nicolas Mavrodinov (Ministere de l'Information et des Arts - Sofia 1947) - one of my prize possessions with 96 pages; wood carvings; and 97 black and white photographs
- **Art of Bulgarian Woodcarvings**; Dimiyt Drumov and Asen Vasilev (1955) monolingual
- **Alexander Zhendov** (1959); ed Mara Tsoncheva (artist in her own right as well as Professor) savage political satire. Monolingual
- **Boris Angeloushev** (1961)
- **Petko Abadjiev** (1969) - with classic plates Part of series 50 pp multilingual
- **Lyuben Gaidarov** (1970) - with classic plates Part of series 50pp multilingual
- **Mara Tsoncheva** (1970) - with classic plates Part of series 50pp multilingual
- **Svetlin Russev** (1971) - with classic plates Part of series 60pp multilingual
- **The Strusht Caricature Almanac** (1971) - a wonderful collection of classic Bulgaria cartoons
- **Le portrait dans la peinture Bulgare (2 part)**; Irina Mihaltcheva (345 pp 1971) Bulgarian only!
- **70 Years of the Sofia Art Academy 1896-1966** (1972) - great collection of class photos as well as reproductions. Monolingual
- **Modern Bulgarian Art**; M Tsoncheva, I Voikova and B Ivanova (Moscow 1974) - a Russian edition
- **The Bulgarian National Liberal Movement in the Fine Arts**; Ivan Marazov (Sofia 1979). Sadly again monolingual
- **Ilyia Beshkov**; Maria Obcharova (1982) - my favourite of about 4 books I have on the great artist and humourist. This one is 355 pages - all in Bulgarian
- **Contemporary Bulgarian Art - Paintings, Graphics and Sculpture** ed Svetlin Russev (Sofia 1982) - the introduction is an stunning paean to the communist party by the Chairman of the Bulgarian Union of Artists (7 pages which says nothing). Russev still bestrides the art scene these days but must regret the opening page's hymn to September 9th 1944 - as well as the obvious omissions. The illustrations are still magnificent 33 years later and the whole book is an incredible bit of history (c 400 pages - not numbered)
- **Ilyia Beshkov** (1983) - 500 pages of comprehensive coverage of most items with extensive text (ed by Bogomil Rainov) which makes me regret not being able to read Bulgarian - although I have found a 1957 copy of a German edition - and also have an old copy of his autobiography
- **Vasil Zachariev** (Ministry of Culture 1985); booklet marking exhibition celebrating centenary of Samakov aquarellist's birth - in German
- **Bulgarische Kunst Heute** (Ludwige Collection Aachen 2nd edition 1987) - a fascinating selection (192 pages) of reproductions of the pieces from a large German collection of

paintings, graphics and sculpture (some of which I understand can be seen in Budapest).
Interesting introductory essays (in German)

- **Marco Behar** by Ivan Mazarov (Bulgarian Publishing House 1987) - 200 pages of great (largely black and white) repros and substantial text but monolingual
- **Dmitir Gydjeeennnov**; (National Historical Museum 1993) a little booklet marking a retrospective exhibition
- **Kiril Tsonev** (1996) - monolingual booklet about a significant Bulgarian modernist
- **Ivan Milev 1897-1997** (1997) 168 pp monolingual about a wonderful secessionist painter
- **Alexander Bozhinov** edited by Ruza Marinska (National Gallery 1999) - most beautiful and detailed 125 page treatment of this early 20th century caricaturist - with an English intro and some annotations
- **Boris Denev -feiuillitons and prison sketches** (1999) monolingual - a small superbly-executed concept with a short selection of his prewar writing; and about 40 sketches from his prison period 1944/45
- **Nikolas Taneff** R Marinska (110 pp bilingual 2000) great collection...
- **A Decade in the Depots - the 80s; known unknown forgotten paintings sculptures etchings** V Nozharova, S Kuyumdzhieva and S Roussev (2002) - superb (unnumbered) coloured catalogue of exhibition revealing the work of artists whose memory has been tragically extinguished
- **Sofia Art Gallery; Catalogue Painting** (Sofia 2003) - almost 3000 small black and white reproductions of the Socia City Gallery collection which can be accessed at <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola0> (a-K); <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola1> <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola2>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola3> (Mi-N)
- <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola4>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola5>;
- <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola7>; <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola8>
- **Boris Angeloushev**; Atanas Stoikov (2003) - extensive 450 page coverage with a lot of text and what looks an almost comprehensive treatment of his works.
- **Catalogue Fineart Gallery Professor Ilyia Petrov, Razgrad** (2004); amazing 400 page (bilingual) presentation of the Razgrad's superb modern gallery (just south of the Russe on the Danube) [Catalogue can be accessed here](#) - with one painting illustrating each page. [Graphics here](#).
- **Marin Ustagenov** (2005) - good selections and a lot of (Bulgarian) text about this great classic but neglected painter....
- **Georgi Popov John** (2006) - bilingual guide to an interesting fairly neglected - Bulgarian painter
- **Russi Ganchev** (National Gallery 2007) - about 100 reproductions and introductory (Bulgarian) text
- **A Journey to Europe (and beyond)** (2007) - a charming booklet on beautiful paper
- **Vasilka Moneva** (2007) - little collection of reproductions (bilingual)
- **Sekul Krumov Sculpture** - anniversary album (2008); nice little 100 page bilingual edition
- **Professor Stefan Dmitrov - Bulgaria's premier ceramicist** (Prof Ivanova 2008) Lovely colour reproductions and black and white group photos from early 20th century
- **Konstantin Shterkelov** (2009) - delightful little Varna catalogue, but monolingual
- **Hristo Kriskaretz** (2009) - little booklet marking 130 years' birth of this Samokov aquarellist

- **Georgi Belstoinev** (2009) - little booklet marking of centenary of this Samokov aquarellist's birth
- **Bencho Obreshkov** (2009) - monolingual guide
- **Marko Monev** - a monolingual guide to a Russe painter (2009)
- **Nikola Tanev** 1890-1962 (124 pp bilingual - National Gallery 2010) - to go with the special exhibition they held then for Tanev.
- **Vaska Popova-Balaverwa** (Context 2010) - a wonderful (bilingual) 120-page celebration of her life edited by her son. Complete with old photographs and reproductions of her many paintings of artistic and literary figures, it gives a wonderful sense of artistic life in Sofia in the first half of the 20th century
- **Slavka Deneva** (Support for Art in Bulgaria Foundation 2010) - great (bilingual) study of the work of Boris Denev's daughter
- **Pencho Balkanski Photography** - in the trail of his Vienna 1936 Exhibition (National Gallery (2010); a wonderful collection of an artist's photos from the 1930s
- **The Choice** (Sofia City Gallery 2011) - 43 Bulgarian art historians have selected one work apiece from the galler'ys extensive archives and discuss it....(bilingual).
- **Nikolai Boiadjiev** (Sofia City Gallery 2011) - unique opportunity to see this largely unknown artist of the first half of the 20th century
- **Nikola Petrov** (Sofia City Gallery 2011) - attractive bilingual booklet
- **Bulgarian Art - 120 years 1892-2012; unions, societies and groups** (Sofia 2012) - superbly-illustrated 360-page with what should have been a fascinating focus on the rise and fall of the various Bulgarian art associations. But little explanation is attempted of these various developments and an opportunity missed to give real flesh to the skeleton. Curiously not a single detail about the hundred of names listed in the pages...
- **Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistora - the flower and the universe** (National Gallery 2012) - wonderful 200 page bilingual publication!
- **Vladimir Dmitrov-Maistora**; 42 pages (2012)
- **Ivan Nenov** (City Gallery 2012) - a good bilingual booklet
- **Georgi Bozhilov-Slona - Portraits of the Spirit** (Ars MMM 2012) a substantial 250 page bilingual text
- **Annual Catalogue of Bulgarian Cartoons 2012-2013**; excellently produced sample of work of contemporary cartoonists (bilingual)....
- **Boris Denev** (2013) - a superb (bilingual) 200 page collection of- text and full-page reproductions of one of Bulgaria's best artists. A nice feature is the black and white photos of him in his studio and with friends (such as Nikola Tanev)
- **Jules Pascin** (City Gallery 2013) - typically professional and extensive treatment by the City Gallery staff of an artist who spent most of his life in France. (120 pp Bilingual)
- **Life-Portayal by K Shturkelov** (2013) - a substantial 200 page paperback of reproductions I unearthed in the fantastic Ileana bookshop near the Russian Church
- **Stoyan Sertev (1906 - 1974) An Epoch in Black and White**; Ivo Hadjimishev (2013) - wonderful tribute to both the art of photography but also to the painters and musicians of the pre-war period... bilingual
- **The Teacher; retrospective exhibition of Mihail Krastev** - excellent small bilingual catalogue to an inspiring but modest teacher (City Gallery 2013). A model of what a catalogue should be

- **Geography of Imagination; Nikolai Yanakiev – graphics and exLibreses** (2013) – an exemplary tribute to a wonderful graphic artist who died in 2003 – superbly published by his wife (76 pp)
- **Sirak Skitnik – 130th anniversary** (2013) 300 pages (bilingual)
- **Xristo Kavarnaliev 1894-1951**; by Velrie Posharov (Biblioteka Klassika 2014) beautiful but monolingual 170 page book
- **Nikolay Raynov** (National Gallery 2014); beautiful – and bilingual – 80 page text about one of the secessionists
- **Boris Angelushev**; drawings and illustrations from the Boris Angelushev Foundation (National Gallery 2014) 88 pages
- **Naum Hadjimladenov**; (2014) booklet celebrating 120th anniversary of the artist's birth
- **Peintres Bulgares ayant suivi etudes et formation a Paris 1881-1944**; Doroteya Sokolovo (Sofia 2014) 48 pages (bilingual)
- **Studio-collection Svetlin Roussev**; stunning 200 page catalogue of the collection of Bulgaria's Eminence Gris of art which he acquired in his long stint as Chairman of the Bulgarian Union of Artists in the 1970s and subsequently donated to the nation...
- **Art For Change 1985-2015** ed Maria Vassileva (Sofia City Gallery 2015); an exploration of the changing fashions of the last 30 years in the Bulgarian art scene (360 pages – bilingual) with most of the emphasis being on so-called "installation art" of which the curator is so fond...(compare with "A Decade in the Depots – the 80s" above)
- **Ivan Dazdov Design Graphicature**; (Ivan Gazdov – 2015) very impressive graphics book celebrating 25th anniversary of the style created by this Sofia Art Academy Prof (120 pp bilingual)
- **Naiden Petkov** (National Gallery 2015) A painter who started his output in the 1945 period and whose work exactly spanned the communist period (50 pp bilingual)
- **Josef Pitter** (National Gallery 2015); a delightfully produced monograph about the works of a little-known Czech graphic artist who came to work at Sofia School of Industrial Arts in 1909, became a full Professor in 1913 before taking a position back in Prague in 1921 as Technical Director for one of the country's best known printing plants (176 pp bilingual)
- **Svetlin Rusev – presented by Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva** (2015) 48pp English
- **Catalogue of Graphic Art** (Sofia City Art Gallery 2015) a glorious record of the gallery's graphic collection with a small reproduction of each item – 770 pages bilingual. That's almost 4000 reproductions!!
- **Afternoon of an ideology** (Sofia City Gallery 2016) another of the series which invites an outsider or two to make a selection from the gallery's huge archives and write a commentary. This is a marvellous collection of material produced in the 45 year communist period
- **120 years since the birth of Tsanko Lavrenov** (Tsanko Lavrenov Foundation 48 pages bilingual 2016). A rare and delightful presentation of this striking (but untrained) painter
- **Efgeni Klintcharov** (National Gallery 2016); 200 plus pages bilingual. An important artists and cultural critic who died in 2013.
- [Un/Noted – part of UBB's Gold Fund Collection](#) (2017) an attractive and free booklet of 60 odd pages (bilingual) to mark the 25th anniversary of the National Bank containing the works which were on display at the National Gallery at the start of the year

- **Georgi Zhelezarov - Between Algeria and Sofia in Search of Light** (Sofia City Gallery 156 pp bilingual 2017) I had considered this artists rather pedestrian but then his family put on an exhibition of the works in their possession - and it was fantastic...

Many of the earlier titles are out of print. Between the 1960s and 1980s a lot of short monographs were also produced on Bulgarian artists and I have editions about Stoian Venev, Jaroslav Veshin, Tsanko Lavrenov, Ivan Lazarov, the great sculptor, the aquarellist Pavel Valkev and Ivan Ivanov - as well as the monumental sculptors - Ivan Funev, Marko Markov and Nikolai Shmirgela

You might be able to pick up the odd copy of these sorts of catalogues - just at the second-hand shop just off Vasil Levsky Bvd (opposite the huge Russian war monument) at the corner with the University

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to produce the core of this book without the support and encouragement of the following people who have become good friends -

Yassen Gollev of [Konus Gallery](#) - also painter and lecturer. who first helped me compile (in 2009 or thereabouts) an initial pencilled list of the classic Bulgarian painters; to whose gallery I would repair proudly clutching some find; and where I would be rewarded with good conversation and a glass of choice rakia (or bourbon)!

Yovo Yovchev was the artist who really introduced me to Bulgarian painting in 2008; who sold me my first Bulgarian painting; subsequently helped me in my searches; and serves great meals in his studio!

Vihra Pesheva of [Astry Gallery](#) which is a haven for particularly living artists (old and young) whose work gets such excellent treatment from her creativity and dedication. Another place I am always assured of a warm welcome - and a taste of good Bulgarian wines.

The photographs in this book come mainly from the internet - particularly such websites as [ArtPrice.BG](#) and the [Victoria gallery](#) and auction house. The latter's website contains a great archive of photographs as well as brief information about some of the painters and was particularly useful in the early stage of my researches. Visits to the municipal galleries throughout the country added to my collection of images.....

The publications of some of the municipal galleries have also been useful in filling out the information on painters given in section nine - particularly the bilingual material produced by [Sofia City Gallery](#). The private [Loran Gallery](#) is also building up a nice little internet resource <http://issuu.com/mariaart/docs/kola0>

Inevitably, some errors will have occurred in the dates given for key events in painters' lives - for which I have to assume complete responsibility. Ditto for the whimsical section on history.....

About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 25 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

He first came to live in Bulgaria in the summer of 2007 - and has since then divided his time between a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains.

In 2008 he started a website which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

In 2009 he started a blog - called [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on. To restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

He now has a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that

old men ought to be explorers

[This flickr account](#) gives more examples of art.....[also this one](#)

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Mapping the common ground](#) (2016)

[In Praise of Doubt – a blogger's year](#) (2016)

[Crafting Effective Public Management](#) (2015)

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014)

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings](#) (2012)

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#) 2012

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power (2012)

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#) (2011)

[The Long Game - not the log-frame](#); (2011)

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010)

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies?](#) (2010) Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project (2009)

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate](#) (2006)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) (2006) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[Case Study in Organisational Development and Political Amnesia](#) (1999)

[In Transit - Part One](#) (1999) The first section of the book I wrote for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?



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